

SUGGESTED
FOR MATURE
READERS



MS. TREE
\$3.95 USA
\$4.75 CAN

Number 4 • Summer 1991

MS. TREE™

QUARTERLY

A COMPLETE
Ms. Tree Thriller
by MAX ALLAN COLLINS
and TERRY BEATTY

ALSO

MIDNIGHT

by Edward Gorman
and Rick Burchett



MS. TREE™

THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I WAS VERY GOOD AT THIS. NOT THAT I EVER GAVE CHRIS EVERT AND MARTINA NAVRATILOVA ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT; ACTUALLY BILLIE JEAN KING WAS MORE MY ERA. BACK IN COLLEGE, WHEN I WAS ON THE TEAM, TWO OR THREE MILLION YEARS AGO.

AND IT HAD BEEN AT LEAST A MILLION YEARS SINCE I'D PLAYED, EVEN JUST FOR RECREATION. IN FACT, RECREATION OF ANY KIND WAS A HABIT I'D LOST. BUT MY CO-WORKERS GANGED UP ON ME AND INSISTED I TAKE SOME TIME OFF. FOR MY OWN GOOD — AND THEIRS.



DROP DEAD HANDSOME

MAX ALLAN COLLINS - writer
GARY KATO - letterer
TERRY BEATTY - artist
KATIE MAIN - associate editor
MIKE GOLD - editor
TOM ZILUKO - colorist

MY EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT HAD BEEN THE MOST INSISTENT, SO I INVITED HER ALONG. HER NAME IS EFFIE, AND SHE'S PLAYED A LOT MORE TENNIS THAN I HAVE IN RECENT YEARS -- BUT I'M STILL BETTER.

DARN!
IT'S YOUR
GAME,
MICHAEL...

WE WERE SPENDING THE WEEKEND AT NORTHSHIRE INN, A RESORT NORTH OF THE CITY. HERE FOR THE "SINGLES SUMMER FEST," AS THE BROCHURE CALLED IT.

IN OTHER WORDS,
WE WERE HERE
TO MEET MEN.

IT'S LOVE.

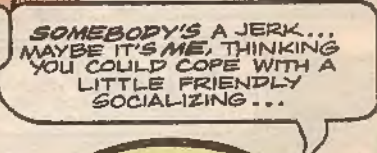
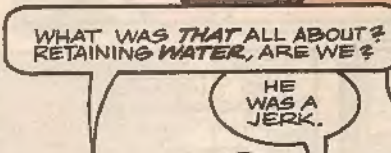
NOT
HARDLY.

MY NAME IS MICHAEL TREE.
I HEAD UP TREE INVESTIGATIONS, INC.,
WHICH MAKES ME A
PRIVATE DETECTIVE.
SOME PEOPLE SAY I'M
TOO INTENSE ABOUT
MY WORK. THIS
WAS MY
CHANCE
TO RELAX.

THAT WAS A PRETTY
HEATED MATCH. YOU
SURE LIVE UP TO YOUR
REPUTATION,
MS. TREE.

OH REALLY?
WHAT REPUTATION
IS THAT?

MICHAEL...





COULDN'T YOU HAVE BEEN NICE, FOR MY SAKE? RICK AND RICK WERE GOING TO ASK US OUT FOR DINNER...

MAYBE IT WAS THAT THEY WERE BOTH NAMED RICK. HAVE YOU EVER MET A 'RICK' WORTH MEETING? TWO AT ONCE! BRRR...



YOU'RE PUTTING UP A WALL, MICHAEL. YOU HAVEN'T HAD A STEADY GUY SINCE YOU BROKE UP WITH THAT NICE INSURANCE EXEC. A COUPLE YEARS AGO! YOU NEED A NEW RELATIONSHIP...

I DON'T KNOW. THIS SINGLES SCENE DOESN'T DO MUCH FOR ME ... I JUST DON'T THINK I'M CUT OUT FOR A "RELATIONSHIP" ANYMORE.

COME ON -- GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK YOU HAD SOME BAD LUCK WITH MEN, IS ALL.

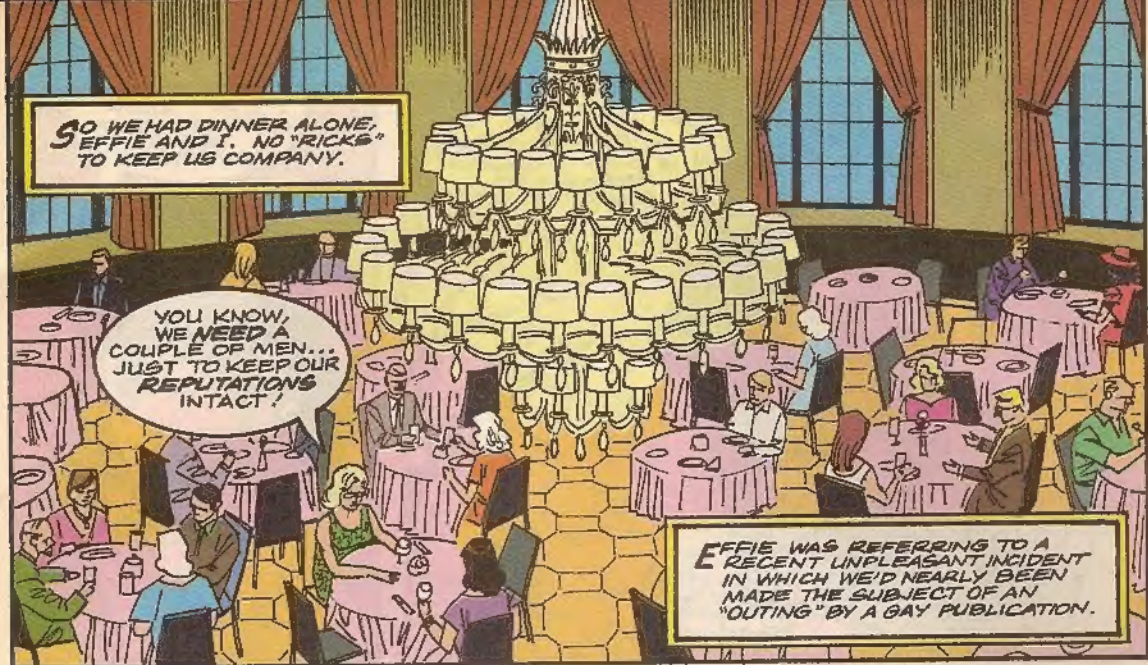


BAD LUCK? I GUESS YOU COULD CALL IT BAD LUCK.



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THAT SOCIAL WORKER? GLENN WHAT'S-HIS-NAME?

HAVEN'T HEARD FROM HIM IN EONS. I DON'T THINK HE EVER GOT OVER THAT RUNAWAY-TURNED-PORN-STAR, TRACY LYNN.



SO WE HAD DINNER ALONE, EFFIE AND I. NO "RICKS" TO KEEP US COMPANY.

YOU KNOW, WE NEED A COUPLE OF MEN... JUST TO KEEP OUR REPUTATIONS INTACT!

EFFIE WAS REFERRING TO A RECENT UNPLEASANT INCIDENT IN WHICH WE'D NEARLY BEEN MADE THE SUBJECT OF AN "OUTING" BY A GAY PUBLICATION.



YOU CAN GO TO THE "CLASS REUNION" DANCE TONIGHT, AND PROVE YOUR HETEROSEXUALITY TO YOUR HEART'S CONTENT.



YOU'RE NOT GOING?

I DON'T THINK SO. SOUNDS A LITTLE SILLY -- PRETENDING TO BE TEEN-AGERS...



WOW! WILL YA LOOK WHO THAT IS?

HUH?



"THAT'S WILLIAM POWERS!" EFFIE SAID. "THE REAL ESTATE TYCOON!" EFFIE WAS THE ONLY WOMAN I KNEW WHO COULD USE WORDS LIKE "WOW" AND "TYCOON" WITH NO IRONY WHATSOEVER.



YEAH,
SO?

SO? SO?
WILLIAM POWERS
IS ONLY CHICAGO'S
ANSWER TO
DONALD TRUMP!



I DIDN'T KNOW
DONALD TRUMP
WAS A
QUESTION.

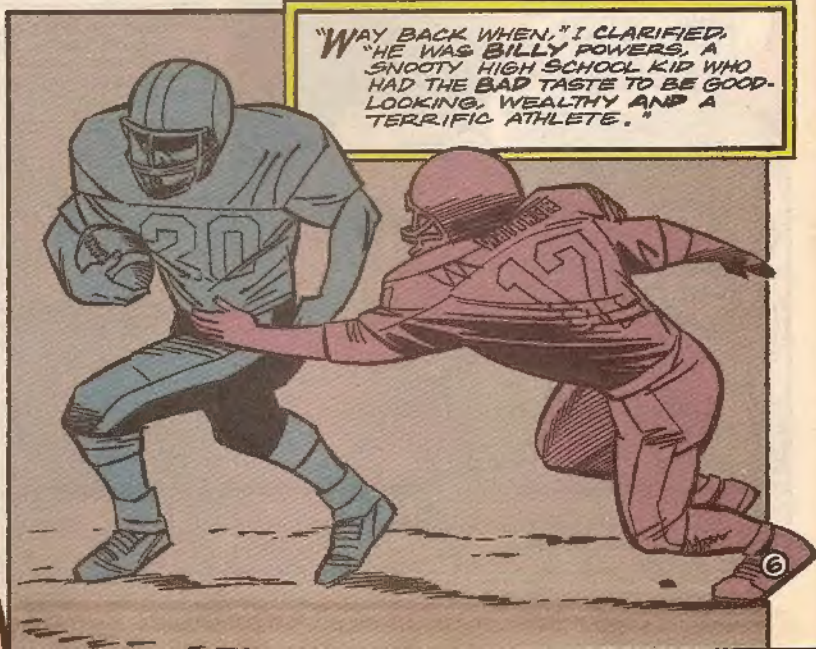
"GOD!" EFFIE SAID. "IS HE DROP-DEAD
HANDSOME OR WHAT? AND THAT
WIFE OF HIS... SHE USED TO BE A
MODEL, YOU KNOW."



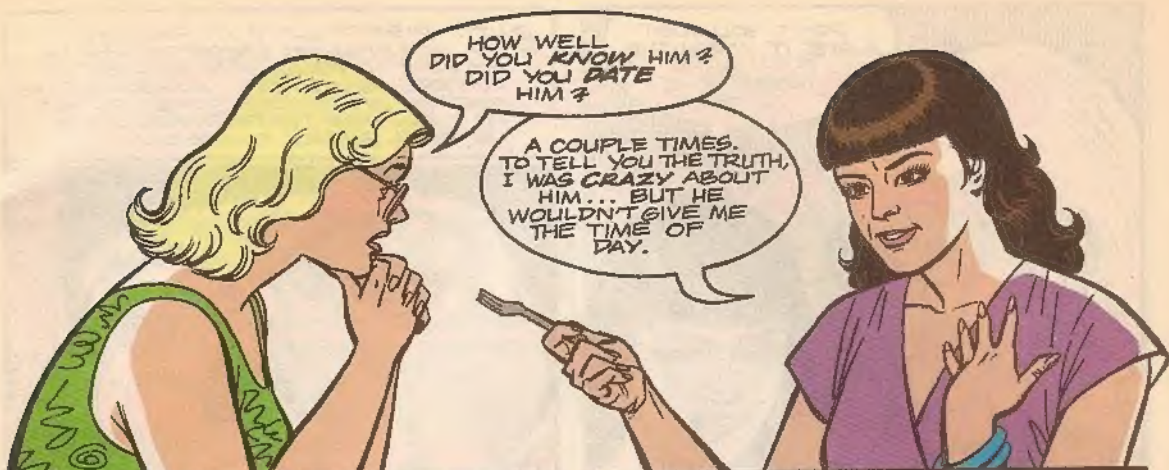
NO KIDDING. LOOK, UH, EFFIE,
I DON'T KNOW HOW TO **BREAK**
THIS TO YOU, BUT I KNEW
WILLIAM POWERS WAY
BACK WHEN.



WAY
BACK
WHEN?



"WAY BACK WHEN," I CLARIFIED.
"HE WAS BILLY POWERS, A
SNootY HIGH SCHOOL KID WHO
HAD THE BAD TASTE TO BE GOOD-
LOOKING, WEALTHY AND A
TERRIFIC ATHLETE."



"BUT YOU SAID YOU DATED HIM..."
"WE WENT OUT," I SAID. "BUT I THINK IT WAS JUST TO MAKE HIS UPPER-CRUST GIRL FRIEND JEALOUS. HE HARDLY SPOKE TO ME; NEVER LAID A HAND ON ME... I REGRET TO SAY."





DON'T YOU JUST LOVE IT WHEN THE RICH HAVE MISERABLE LIVES?



BUT I DIDN'T LOVE IT, REALLY. I'D HAD ENOUGH UNHAPPINESS IN MY LIFE TO FEEL FOR WILLIAM POWERS RIGHT NOW. AND SOMETHING DEEP IN MY PSYCHE, SOME VESTIGE OF TEEN-AGE TENDERNESS, MADE ME FEEL SORRY FOR BILLY.

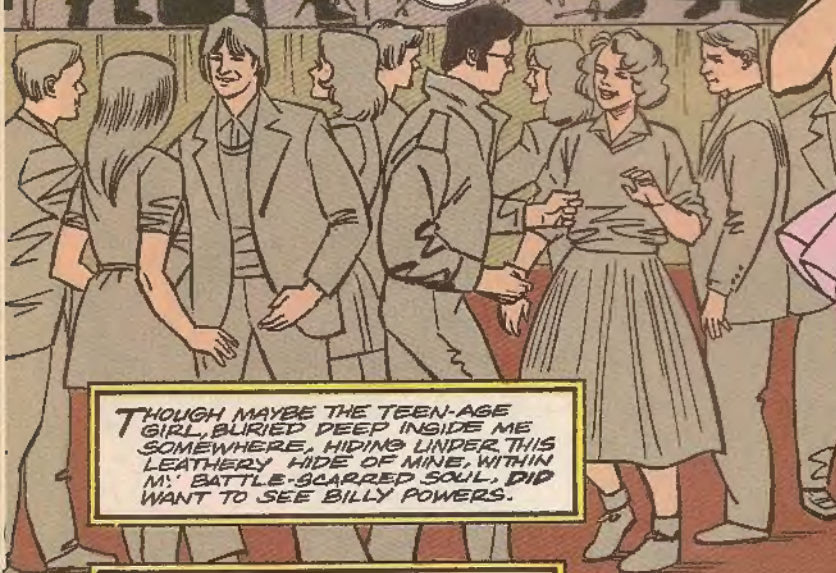
MAYBE THAT WAS WHY I WENT TO THE NORTHSHIRE'S SILLY MOCK CLASS REUNION DANCE. NOT THAT I EXPECTED TO SEE POWERS THERE -- OR EVEN WANTED CONTACT WITH HIM, OF ANY KIND.

YOUR CLASS REUNION



WHAT A CUTE IDEA THIS IS!

IT'S STUPID. REMEMBER BACK WHEN NOSTALGIA WASN'T SUCH A PAIN IN THE ASS? THOSE WERE THE DAYS...



THOUGH MAYBE THE TEEN-AGE GIRL, BURIED DEEP INSIDE ME SOMEWHERE, HIDING UNDER THIS LEATHERY HIDE OF MINE, WITHIN MY BATTLE-SCARRED SOUL, DID WANT TO SEE BILLY POWERS.

MAYBE SHE WANTED IT MORE THAN ANYTHING -- WITH A CRAVING SO SWEET AND INNOCENT AND YET SO DEEP.





BESIDES, EVEN IF WE DIDN'T HAVE A HISTORY -- SUCH AS IT IS -- I'D KNOW YOU'VE MADE QUITE A NAME FOR YOURSELF.

LOOK WHO'S TALKING.



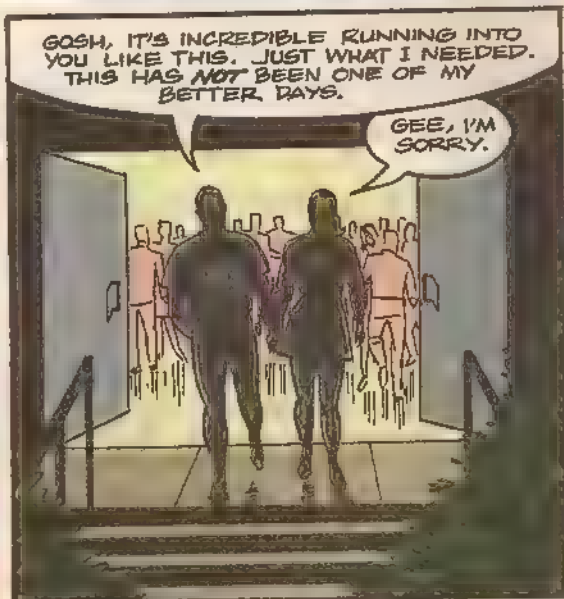
WE'RE BOTH A COUPLE OF RUTHLESS TYPES, AREN'T WE? WE'VE BOTH CLIMBED TO THE TOP OVER THE BODIES OF THE COMPETITION.

ONLY IT PAID BETTER IN YOUR CASE.



DO YOU FEEL AS FOOLISH AS I DO?

AT LEAST, BUT MAYBE IT HELPS KEEP PEOPLE FROM RECOGNIZING US, AND CAUSING US TROUBLE.



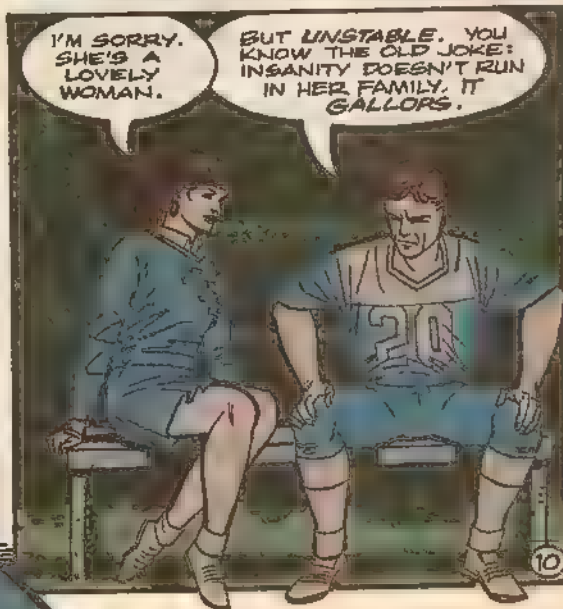
GOSH, IT'S INCREDIBLE RUNNING INTO YOU LIKE THIS. JUST WHAT I NEEDED. THIS HAS NOT BEEN ONE OF MY BETTER DAYS.

GEE, I'M SORRY.

WE WERE REVERTING TO TEEN-AGE: THE MILLIONAIRE (OR WAS IT BILLIONAIRE?) WAS SAYING "GOSH," AND THE HARD-BOILED LADY DICK WAS SAYING "GEE."



MELODIE... MY WIFE... SHE'S FILING FOR DIVORCE.



I'M SORRY. SHE'S A LOVELY WOMAN.

BUT UNSTABLE. YOU KNOW THE OLD JOKE: INSANITY DOESN'T RUN IN HER FAMILY. IT GALLORS.

WE'VE BEEN SEPARATED, BUT I ARRANGED THIS GETAWAY WEEKEND TO TRY TO PATCH THINGS UP... BUT SHE WALKED OUT. IT'S JUST NOT WORKING...

IT'S OVER. I MEAN, IT'S NO TRAGEDY, REALLY... WE HAVE NO CHILDREN. MONEY ISN'T AN ISSUE: MELODIE IS THE KINGSTON PAPER MILLS HEIRESS.

HE EXPLAINED THAT BY PRENUPTIAL AGREEMENT, THE FORTUNE OF EITHER PARTY WASN'T TOUCHED IN A DIVORCE.

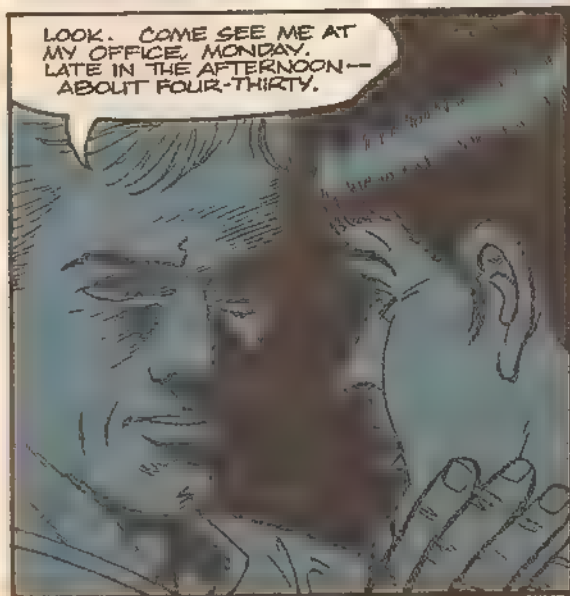
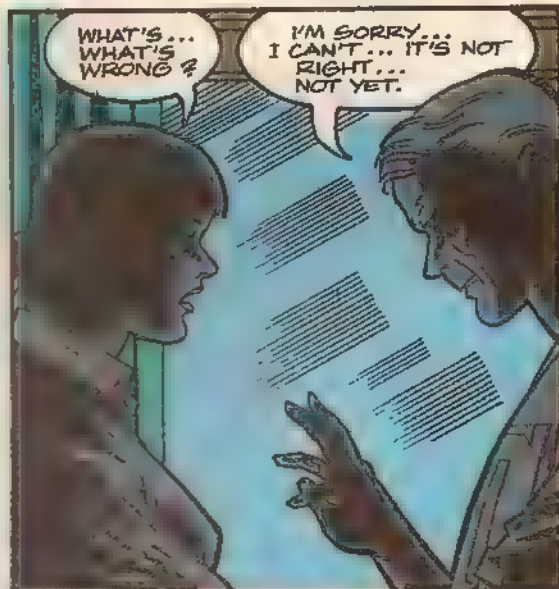
IT'S MY OWN FAULT. I'VE BEEN SO IMMERSSED IN BUSINESS, THERE'S BEEN LITTLE TIME FOR MELODIE.

I GUESS I'VE NEVER BEEN GOOD AT COMMUNICATING WITH THE LADIES. DID YOU KNOW I HAD THE BIGGEST CRUSH ON YOU, IN HIGH SCHOOL?

ME?!?

I WAS JUST TOO SHY TO TELL YOU. I BET YOU THOUGHT I WAS JUST A STUCK-UP JERK.

ACTUALLY, YES. BUT IT DIDN'T KEEP ME FROM HAVING A CRUSH ON YOU...

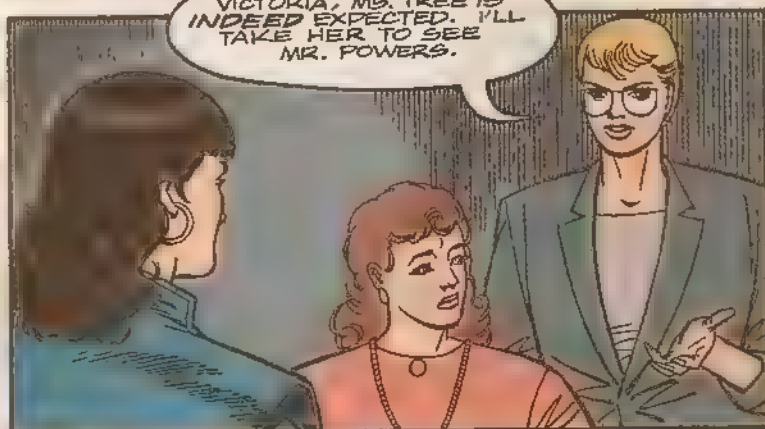


HE DIDN'T HAVE TO GIVE ME DIRECTIONS TO HIS OFFICE. EVERYBODY IN CHICAGO KNEW THE POWERS TOWERS.

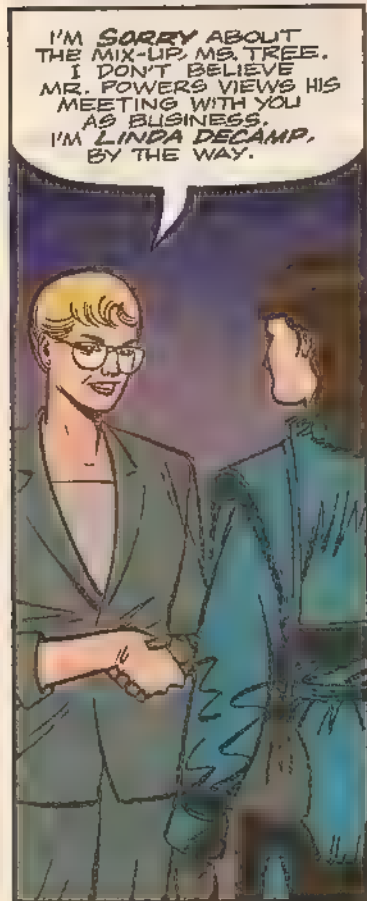


MICHAEL TREE. I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT TO SEE MR. POWERS.

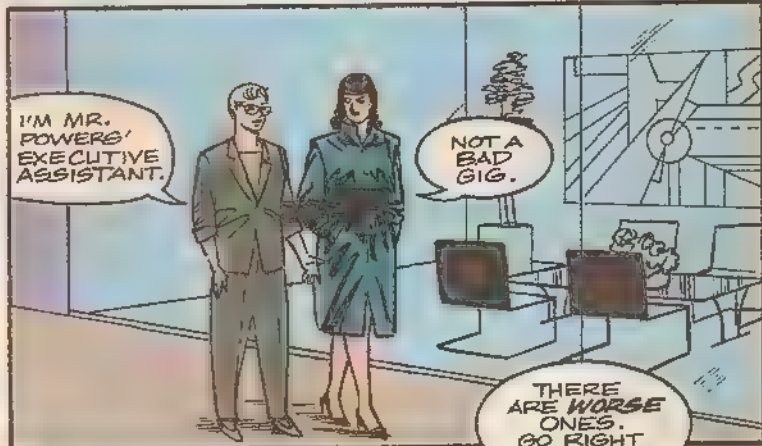
I'M AFRAID YOU'RE NOT IN THE COMPUTER.



VICTORIA, MS. TREE IS INDEED EXPECTED. I'LL TAKE HER TO SEE MR. POWERS.



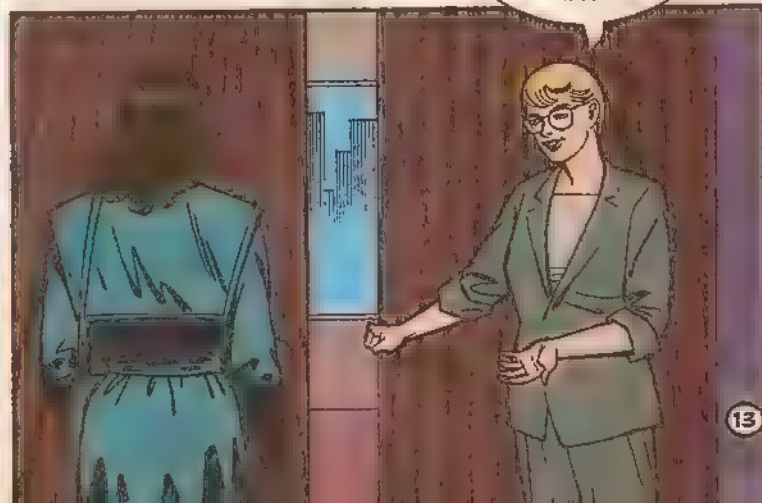
I'M SORRY ABOUT THE MIX-UP, MS. TREE. I DON'T BELIEVE MR. POWERS VIEWS HIS MEETING WITH YOU AS BUSINESS. I'M LINDA DECAAMP, BY THE WAY.

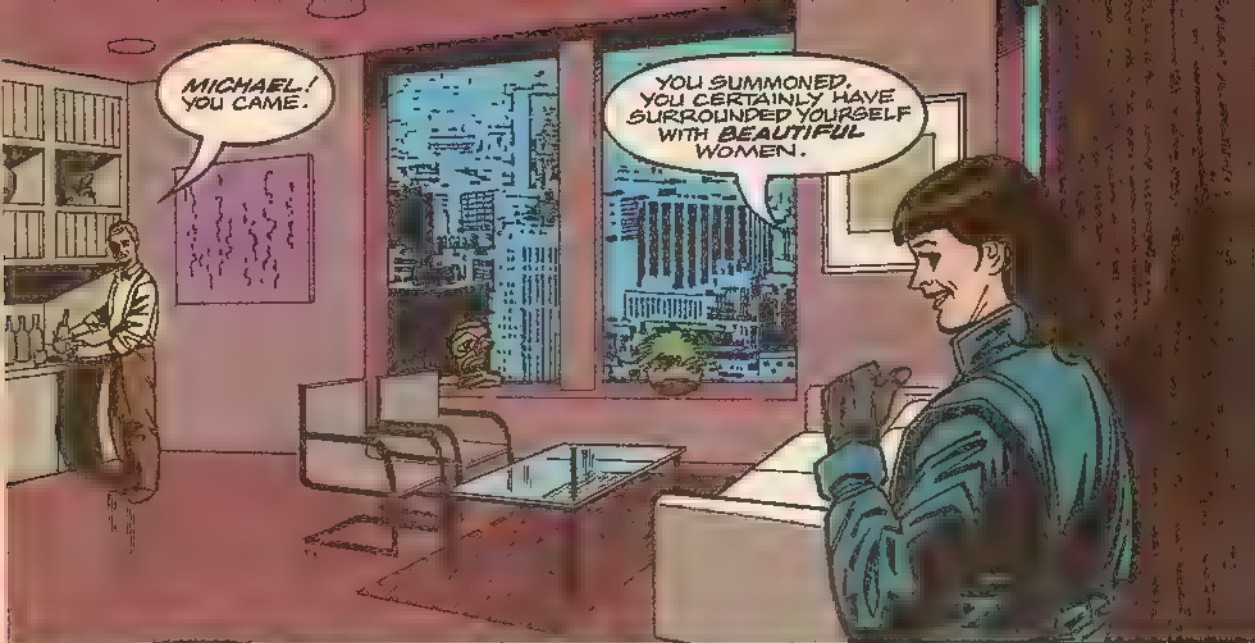


I'M MR. POWERS' EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT.

NOT A BAD GIG.

THERE ARE WORSE ONES. GO RIGHT IN.





MICHAEL!
YOU CAME.

YOU SUMMONED.
YOU CERTAINLY HAVE
SURROUNDED YOURSELF
WITH BEAUTIFUL
WOMEN.



RANK
HAS ITS
PRIVILEGES.

SOME PRIVILEGES
CAN GET PRETTY
RANK, AT THAT.



SERIOUSLY,
MANY OF MY
TOP MEN ARE
WOMEN.

ACTUALLY, I
READ ABOUT YOUR
THEORIES IN YOUR
BOOK.

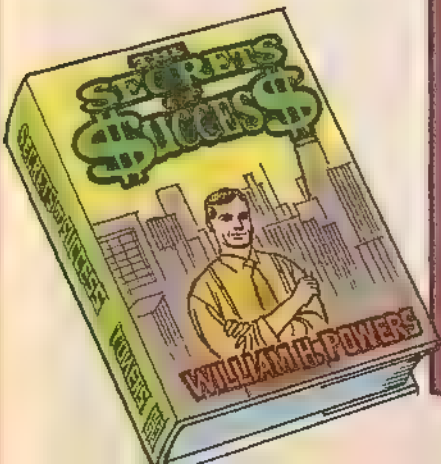
"YOU HIRE WOMEN WITH
BRAINS AND LOOKS TO
DO YOUR NEGOTIATING,
TAPPING INTO BOTH THE
CHALVINISM AND CHIVALRY
OF THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY
MALE."

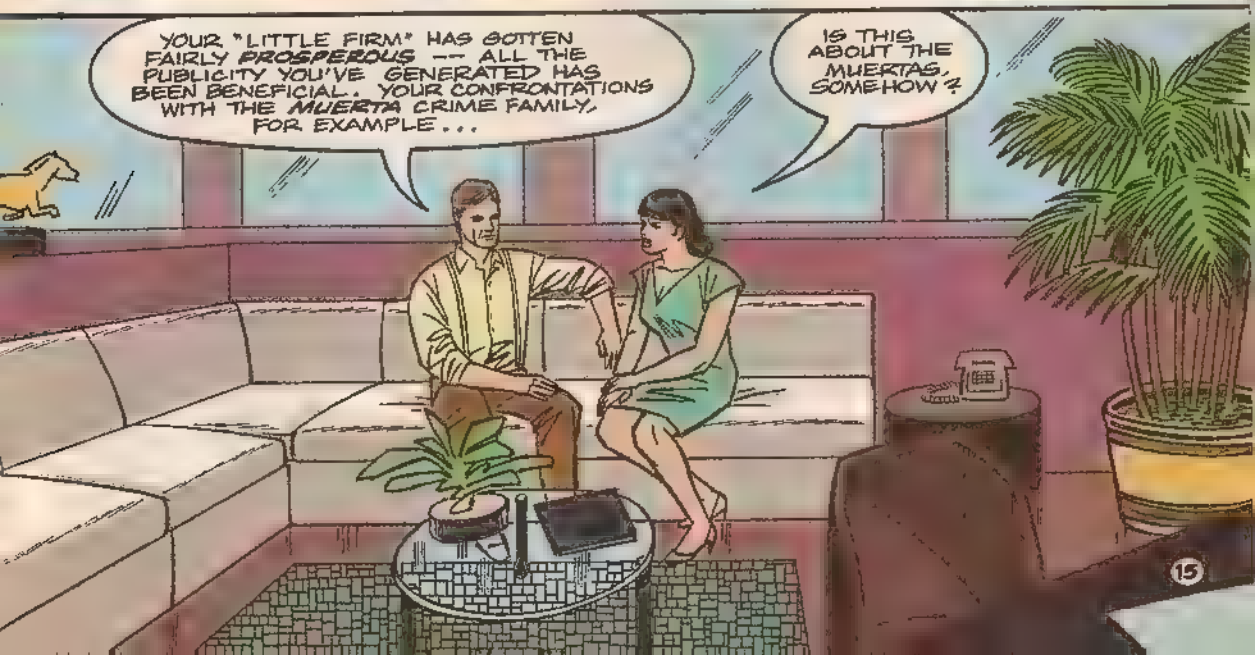
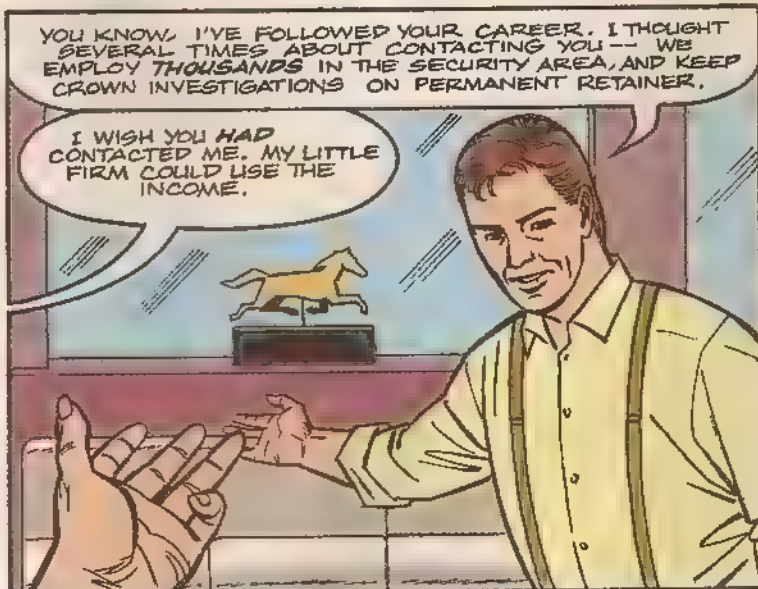
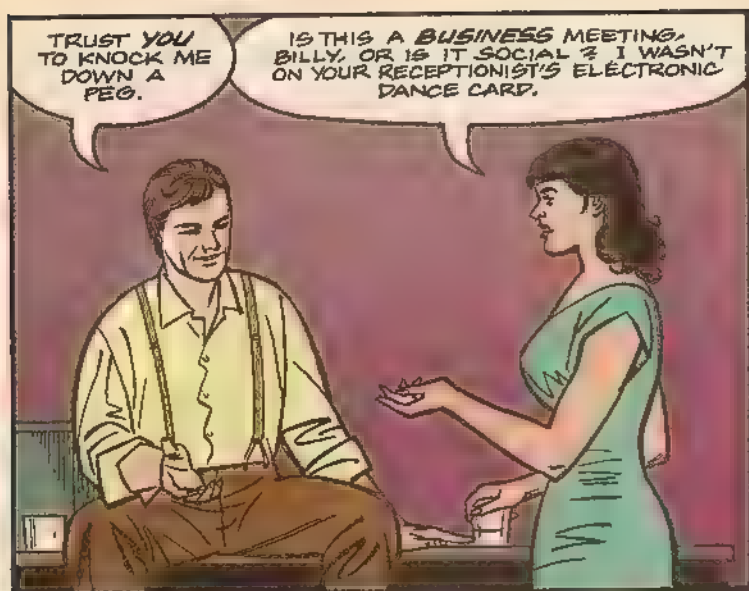


I'M FLATTERED YOU
READ IT. YOU KNOW,
SOME PEOPLE FIND ME
A LITTLE ARROGANT.



OH, I DON'T FIND YOU
A LITTLE ARROGANT,
BILLY.





YES IT IS. I'VE BEEN HAVING SOME PROBLEMS WITH THEM. SPECIFICALLY, WITH THIS NEW YOUNG TURK, "DON DONNIE," THE LATEST MUERTA GENERATION.

YOU HAVEN'T DONE BUSINESS WITH THOSE PEOPLE, HAVE YOU? I KNOW YOU HAVE CASINO INTERESTS...

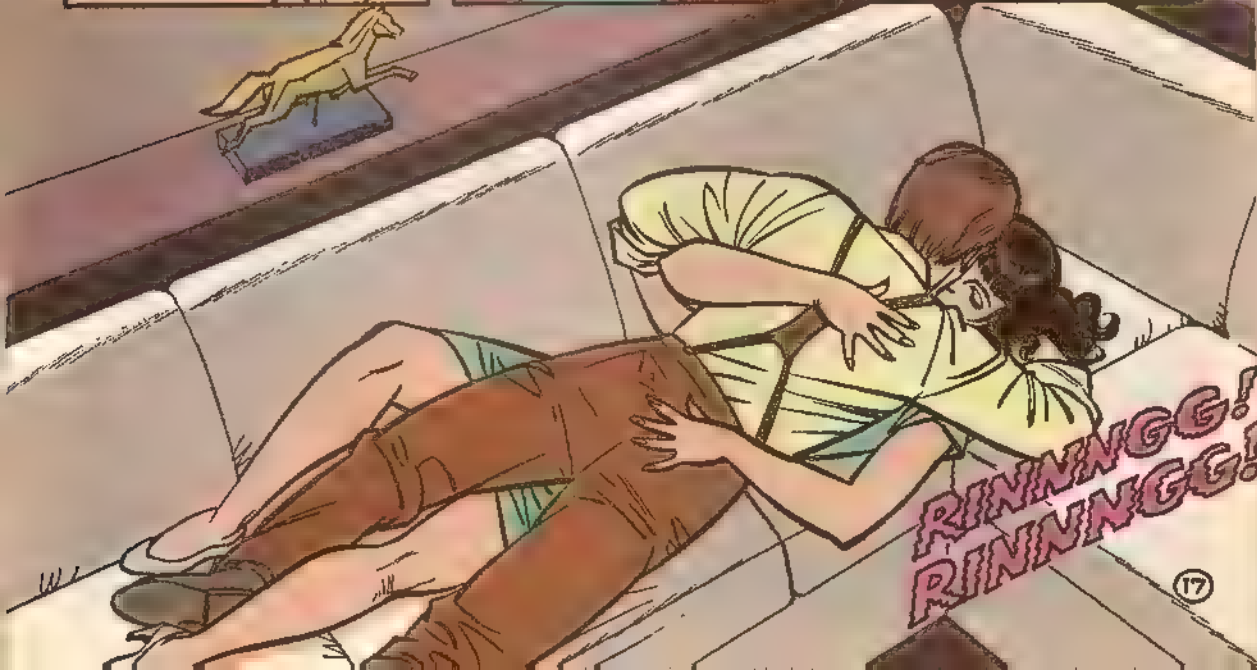
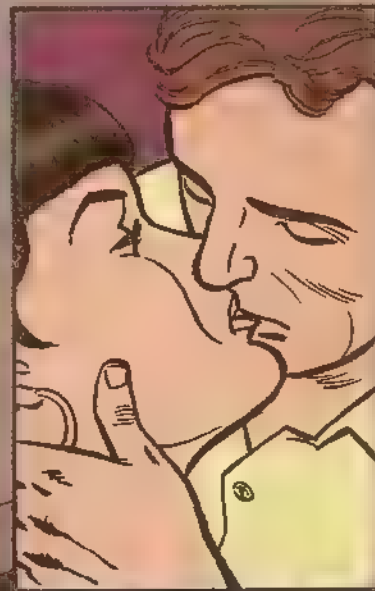
THAT'S JUST THE THING. YOU SEE, I'VE HAD SOME CASH FLOW PROBLEMS... I'M SURE YOU'RE AWARE OF THAT, FROM THE PRESS. NOTHING I CAN'T HANDLE...

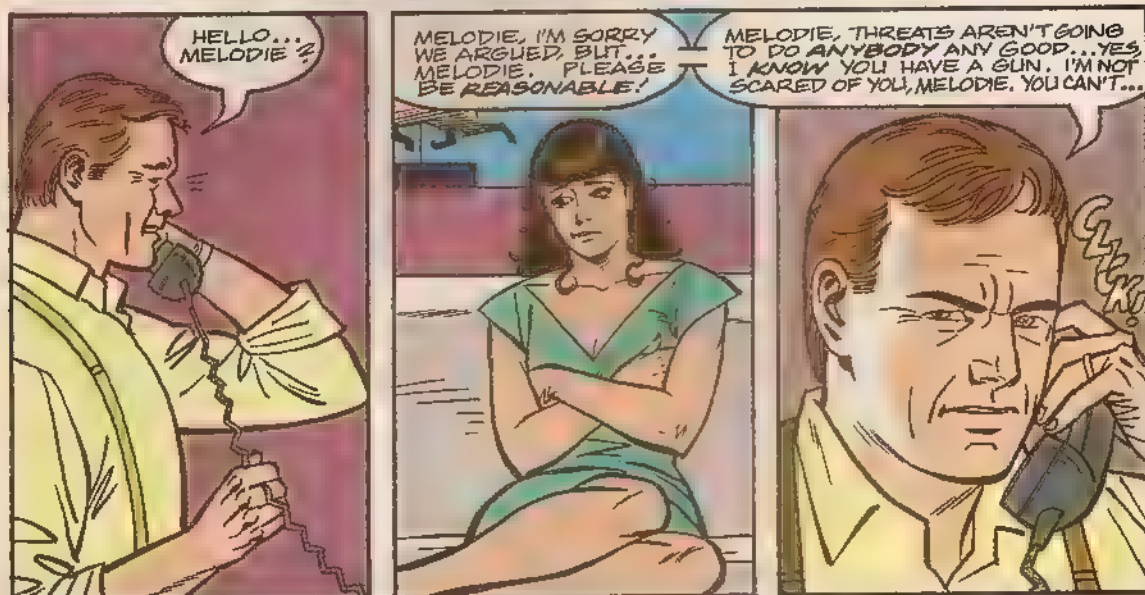
BUT THE MUERTAS -- THAT IS, DON DONNIE -- WANTS TO LEND A HELPING HAND.

THEY WANT TO BUY IN, YOU MEAN.

THAT'S RIGHT. AS SILENT PARTNERS. I'VE REBUFFED THEM, BUT THERE HAVE BEEN THREATS. EVEN A COUPLE HALF-ASSED ATTEMPTS ON MY LIFE...

"WORD IS DON DONNIE IS SCARED SHITLESS OF YOU, MICHAEL. I WANT YOU TO GO TO HIM AND LET HIM KNOW YOU'RE ON MY PERSONAL RETAINER. TELL HIM TO LAY OFF. PUT THE FEAR OF GOD AND MS. TREE IN HIM."





HE WOULDN'T SPEAK FURTHER ON THE SUBJECT. WE RETIRED TO HIS PENTHOUSE APARTMENT, ABOVE THE OFFICE.

THIS IS ANDRE, MY PERSONAL CHEF. AND I PROMISED YOU A VERY SPECIAL DINING EXPERIENCE.

MR. POWERS, I HOPE YOU ARE SATISFIED WITH THE RESULTS. THIS IS A FIRST FOR ME.

RARE CHEESEBURGERS WITH BARBECUE SAUCE ON THE SIDE ... COLESLAW ... ONION RINGS ... WITH DOUBLE-CHOCOLATE MALTEDS ON THE WAY.

IT'S A DEB'S DRIVE-IN SPECIAL!

NOT THE REAL THING ... JUST THE BEST SIMULATION ANDRE COULD MANAGE.

MY COMPLIMENTS, ANDRE.

THANK YOU, MADAM.

DO YOU LIKE IT? I OWN A LOT OF IT. YOU CAN HAVE AS MUCH AS YOU LIKE.

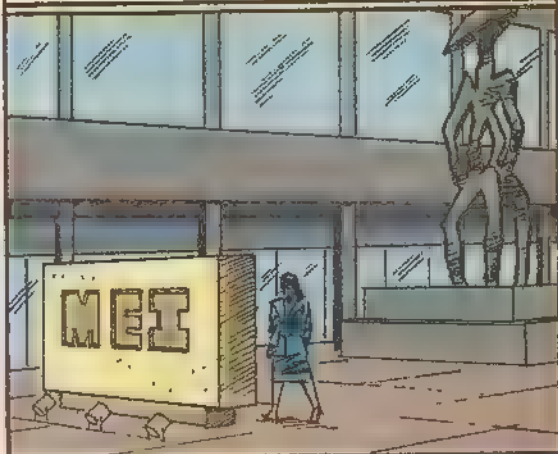


I STAYED THE NIGHT. BUT I LEFT BEFORE BREAKFAST...

YOU SURE YOU WANT TO GO? ANDRE WHIPS UP A MEAN OMELET...

I'M SURE HE DOES, BUT I ALREADY HAVE A FULL PLATE, TODAY...

AFTER STOPPING AT HOME TO FRESHEN UP AND CHANGE, AND CHECKING IN AT THE OFFICE WHERE I HAD A NINE O'CLOCK CONFERENCE WITH A CLIENT, I MADE A CALL AT THE CORPORATE OFFICES OF MUERTA ENTERPRISES.



I DON'T HAVE AN APPOINTMENT. JUST TELL DONNIE I'M HERE-- HE'LL SEE ME.

JUST A MOMENT, MS. TREE...

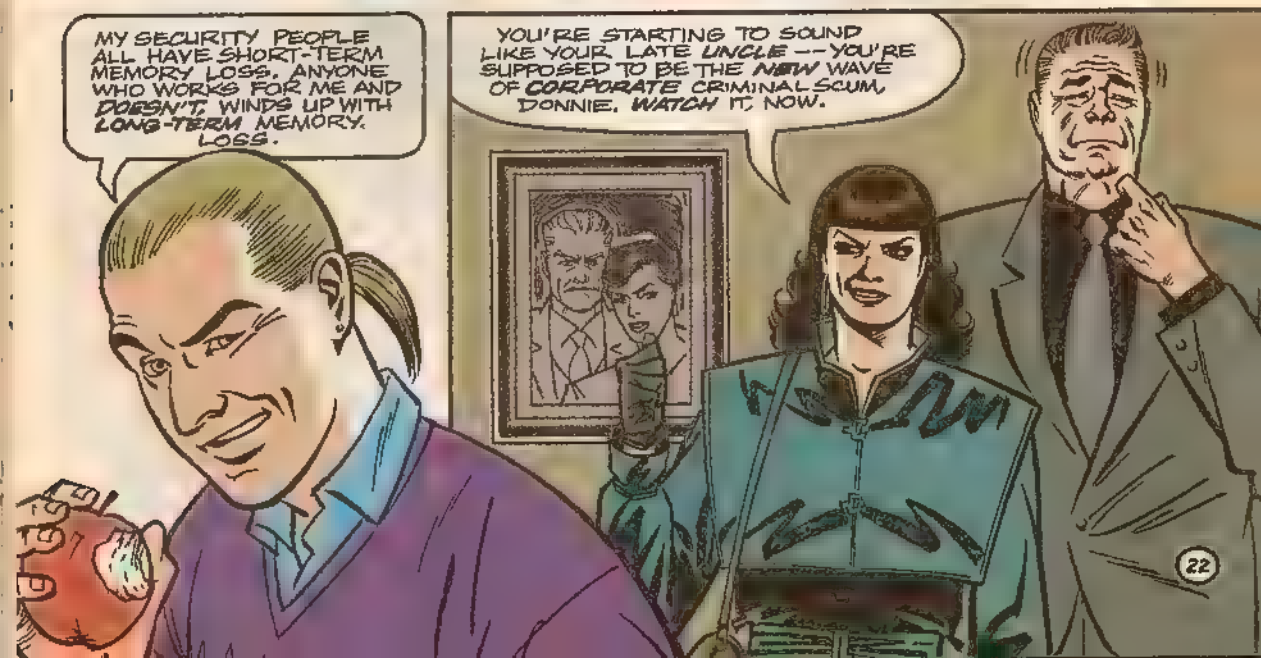
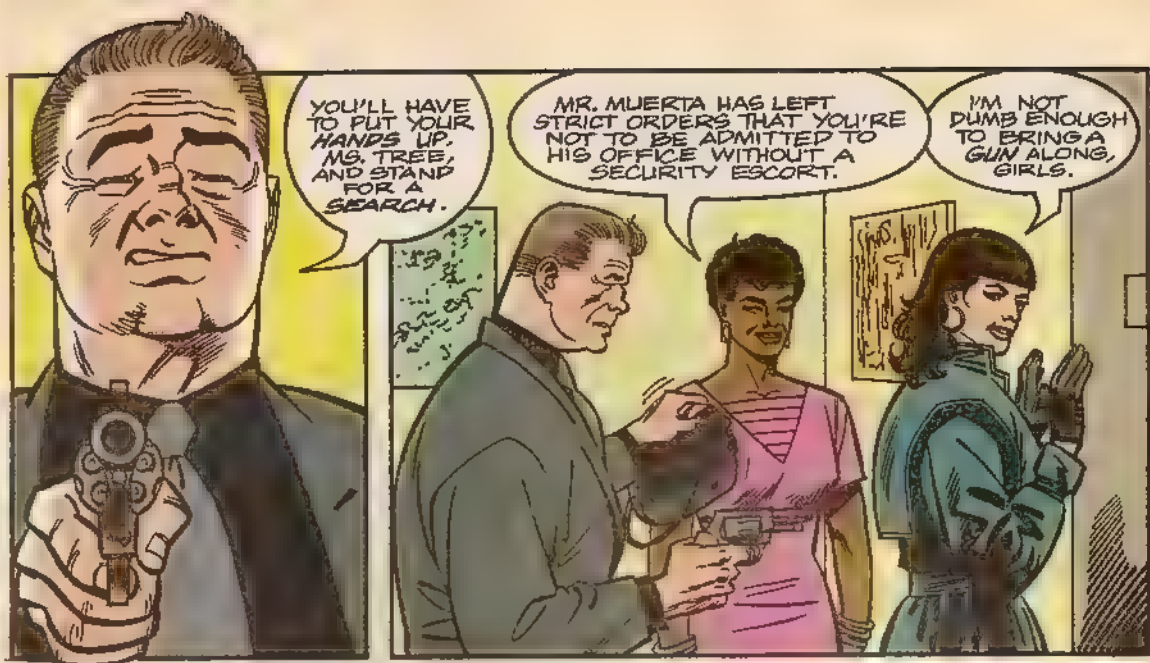
MS. TREE TO SEE MR. MUERTA.

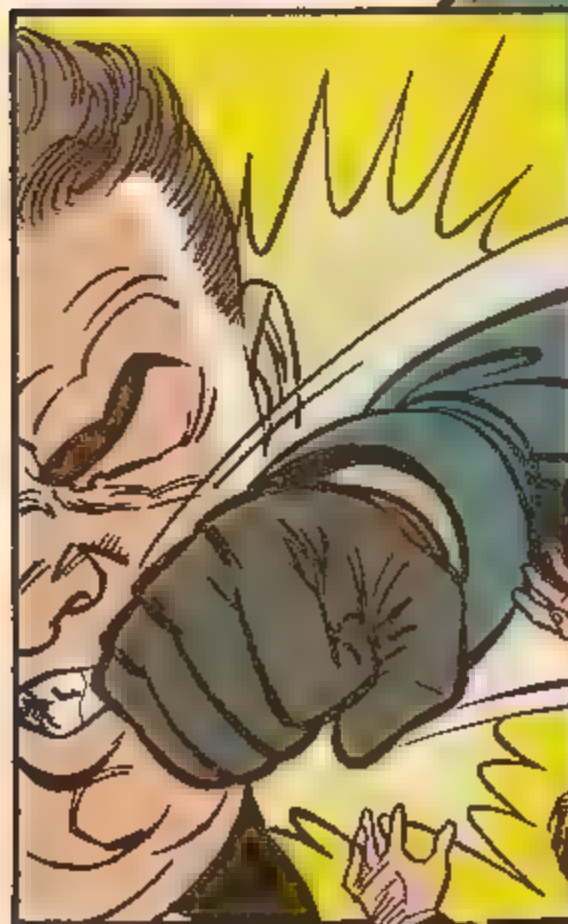
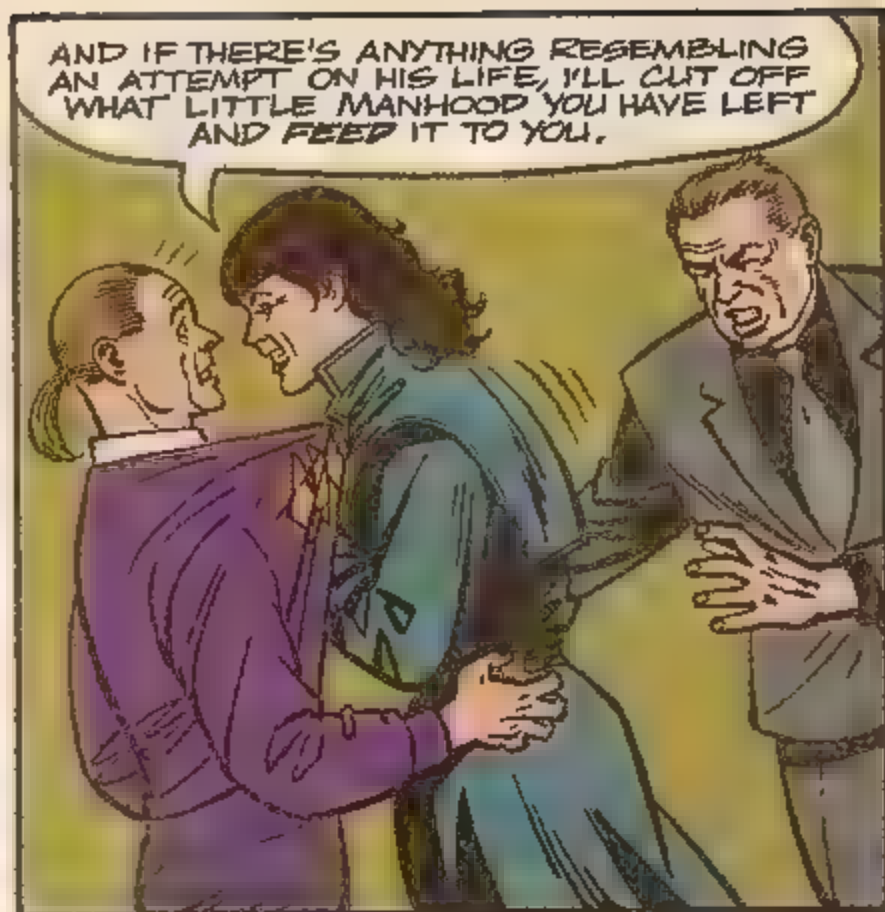
IT'LL BE JUST A FEW MINUTES...

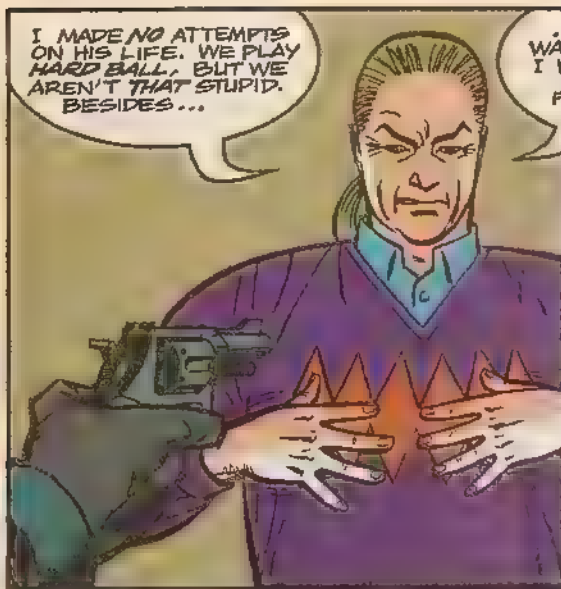
THAT'S TOO LONG A WAIT. I'LL GO IN, THANKS.

EXCUSE ME.

DONALD MUERTA
CHIEF
EXECUTIVE
OFFICER







I MADE NO ATTEMPTS ON HIS LIFE. WE PLAY HARD BALL, BUT WE AREN'T THAT STUPID. BESIDES...

... IF I DID WANT HIM KILLED, I WOULDN'T SEND ONE OF MY PEOPLE TO DO THE JOB.

WHO WOULD YOU SEND, THEN?



"THAT WIFE OF HIS. I'D JUST GIVE HER A LITTLE NUDGE. EVERYBODY KNOWS SHE'S THREATENED HIS LIFE MANY TIMES."

AT THE OFFICE, I SPOKE TO MOLLY O'MERA, WHOSE COLUMN A IN THE TRIB TRACKED THE LOCAL CELEBRITY DIRT...



GOT YOUR FAX, MOLLY - THANKS FOR GETTING RIGHT ON THIS.

NO PROBLEM. AND IT'S NOT JUST GOSSIP...



... MR. AND MRS. POWERS HAD A BIG, SCREAMING-BLOODY-MURDER FIGHT AT THE OPENING OF THE GREELY PHOTOGRAPHY SHOWING LAST MONTH.



SHE THREATENED HIS LIFE... ACCUSED HIM OF RUNNING AROUND ON HER...

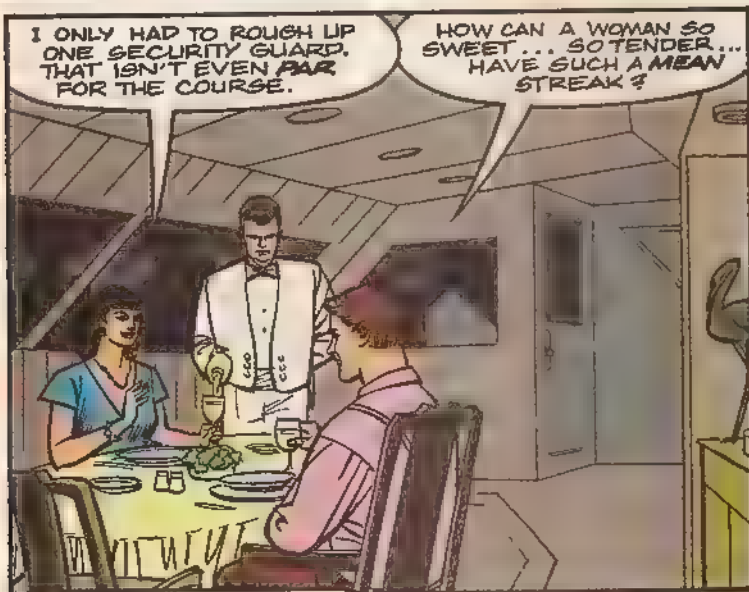
I REPORTED TO MY CLIENT, WHO INVITED ME FOR A LATE SUPPER ON HIS YACHT, WHICH WAS DOCKED AT THE LAKEFRONT MARINA.

I'M GLAD THE MEETING WITH DON DONNIE WENT SMOOTHLY.



I ONLY HAD TO ROUGH UP ONE SECURITY GUARD. THAT ISN'T EVEN PAR FOR THE COURSE.

HOW CAN A WOMAN SO SWEET... SO TENDER... HAVE SUCH A MEAN STREAK?



HOW CAN A SWEET, TENDER GUY LIKE YOU BE THE MOST RUTHLESS BUSINESSMAN IN TOWN?

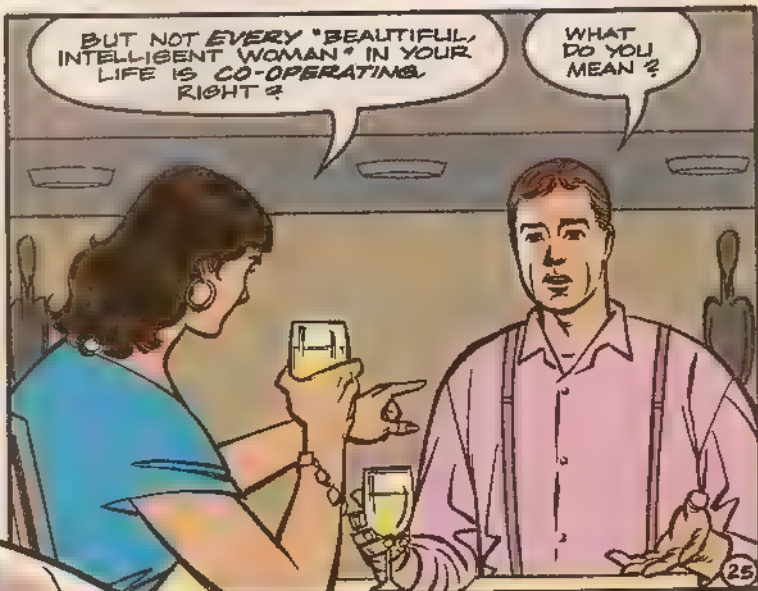


IT'S LIKE I SAID BEFORE: I JUST HIRE BEAUTIFUL, INTELLIGENT WOMEN TO DO MY DIRTY WORK FOR ME.



BUT NOT EVERY "BEAUTIFUL, INTELLIGENT WOMAN" IN YOUR LIFE IS CO-OPERATING, RIGHT?

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?





I WAS REFERRING TO YOUR WIFE, BILL.

PLEASE. LET'S NOT SPOIL A PERFECT EVENING.

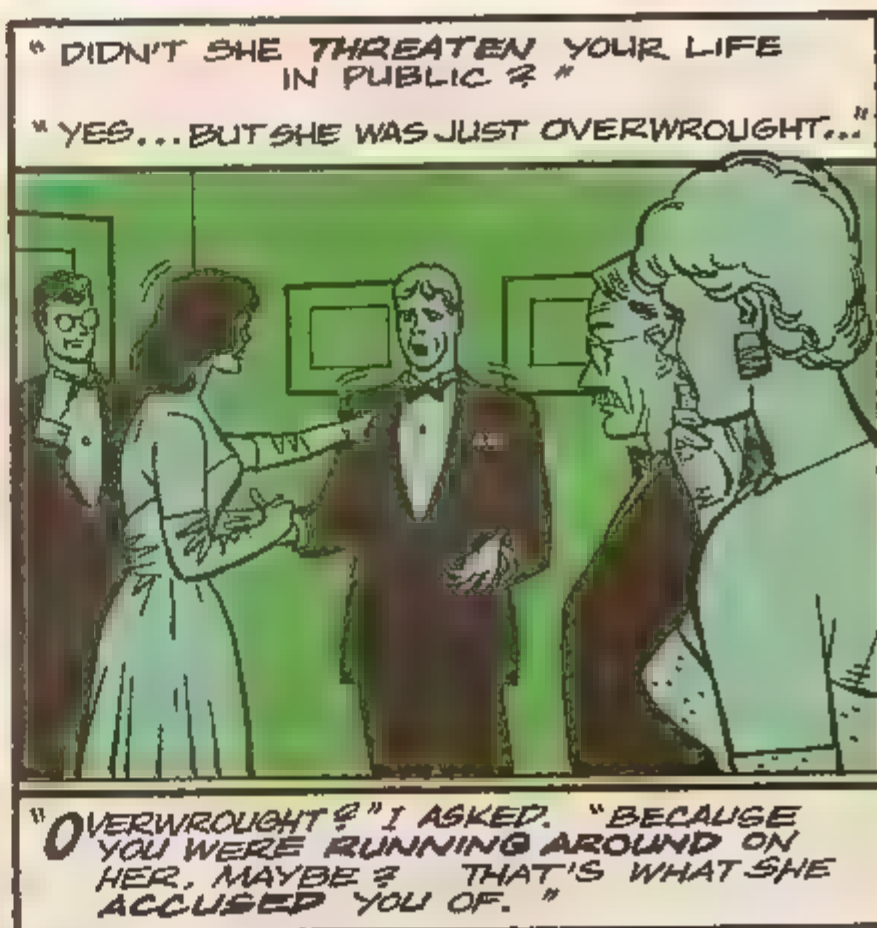


I KNOW YOU DIDN'T HIRE ME TO PROTECT YOU FROM YOUR "BETTER HALF" ... BUT MY AGENCY HANDLES A LOT OF DOMESTIC DISPUTES. I'VE SEEN IT MANY TIMES.



YOUR WIFE MAY BE DANGEROUS.

SHE'S ALL TALK, MICHAEL.



" DIDN'T SHE THREATEN YOUR LIFE IN PUBLIC ? "

" YES... BUT SHE WAS JUST OVERWROUGHT... "

" OVERWROUGHT ? " I ASKED. " BECAUSE YOU WERE RUNNING AROUND ON HER, MAYBE ? THAT'S WHAT SHE ACCUSED YOU OF. "



YOU ARE A DETECTIVE.



WAS IT TRUE ?

ABSOLUTELY NOT. I HAVEN'T HAD TIME FOR A PERSONAL LIFE, MICHAEL, WITH THESE ASSAULTS ON MY BUSINESS INTERESTS REQUIRING MY TIME.

MELODIE'S A VERY INSECURE PERSON -- HER FATHER AND MOTHER BROKE UP WHEN SHE WAS YOUNG, AND... WELL, I'LL SPARE YOU THE DIMESTORE PSYCHOLOGY. LET'S JUST SAY SHE'S PARANOID AND LEAVE IT AT THAT.

IF MELODIE TRULY IS THIS "OVERWROUGHT" ... EVEN MENTALLY DISTURBED... YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL, I HEARD YOU MENTION A GUN ON THE PHONE, WHEN YOU SPOKE WITH HER.



SHE WOULDN'T HURT A FLY.

THAT'S WHAT ANTHONY PERKINS SAID ABOUT HIS MOTHER IN *PSYCHO*.



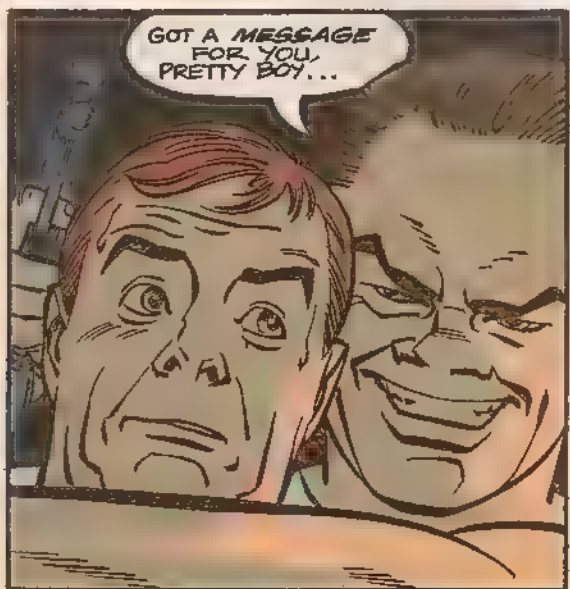
LISTEN TO ME, BILL! YOU'RE AN EXECUTIVE -- YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT CHARTS AND GRAPHS AND STATISTICS. WELL, THE STATISTICS SAY THAT MURDERS USUALLY HAPPEN WITHIN FAMILIES... MOST OFTEN BETWEEN HUSBANDS AND WIVES.

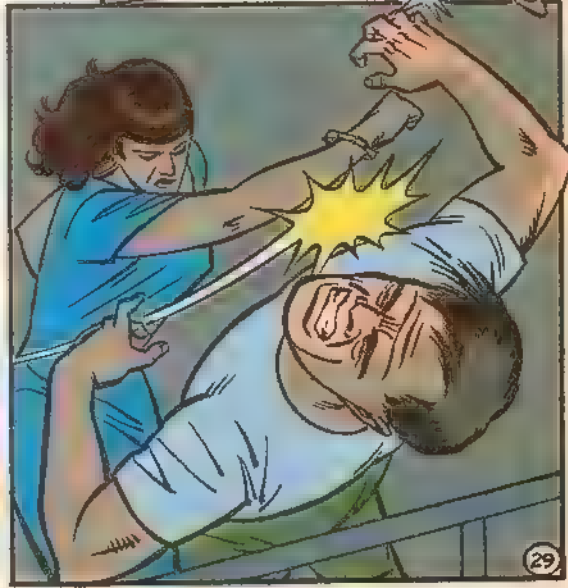
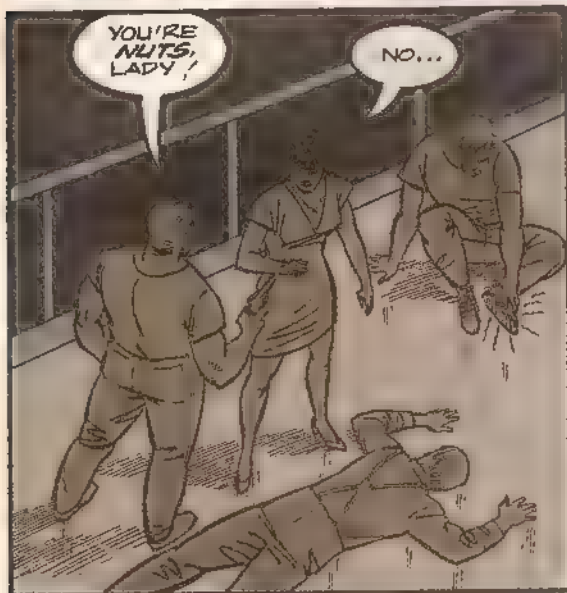
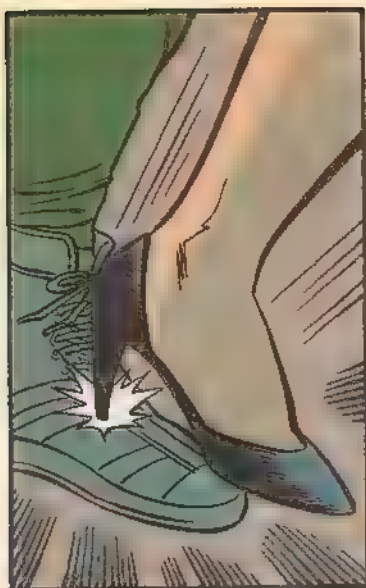


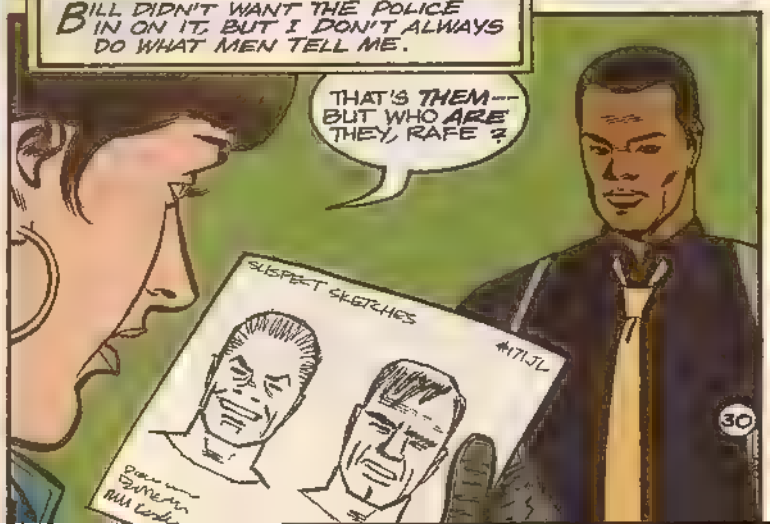
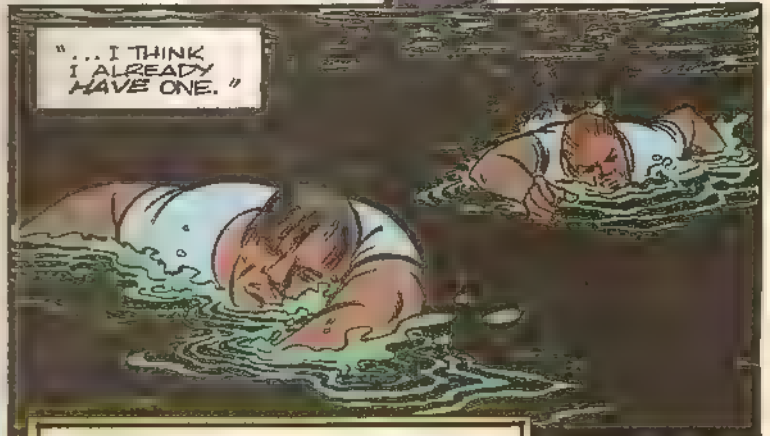
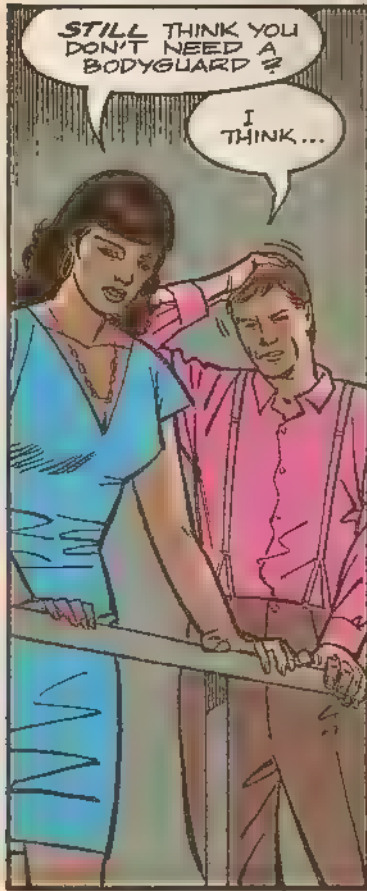
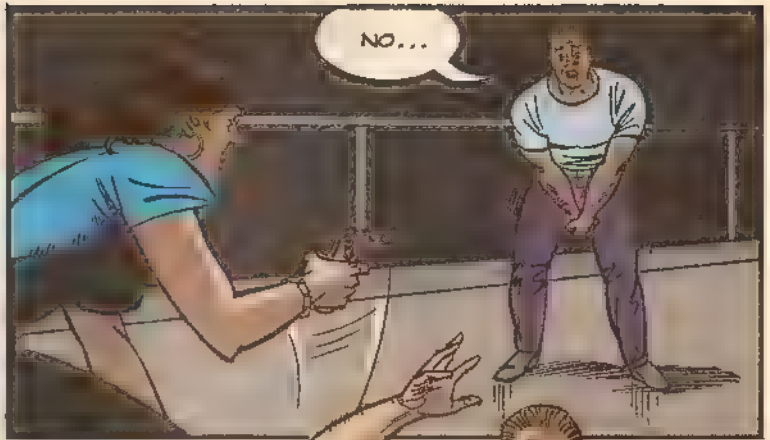
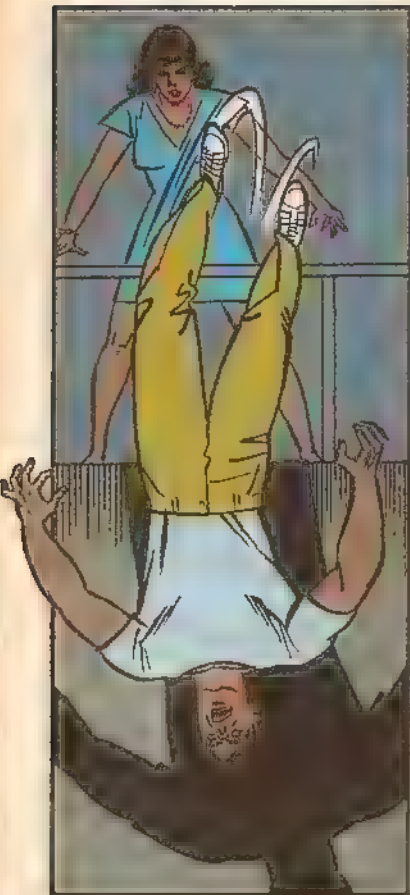
WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO ABOUT IT?

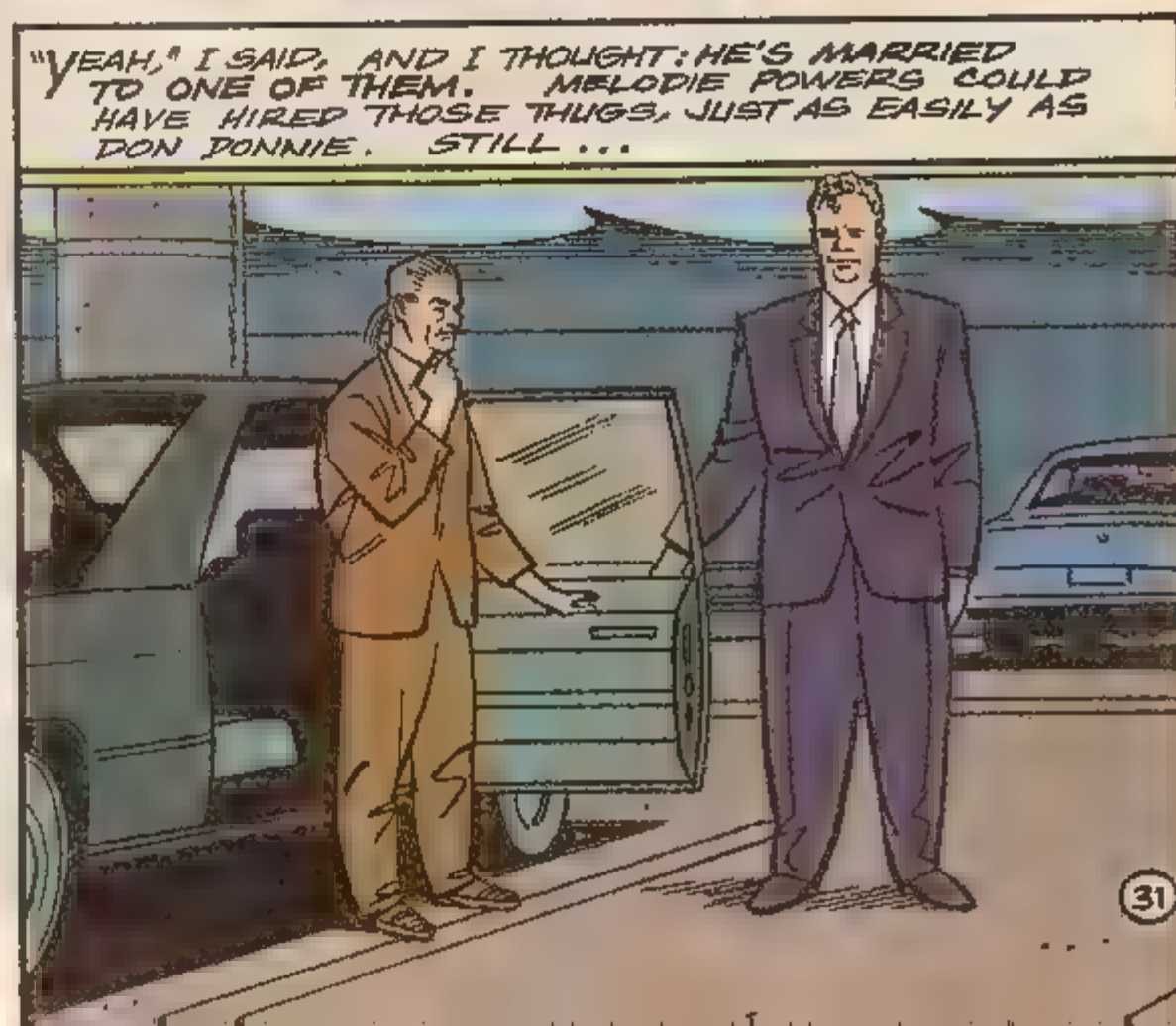
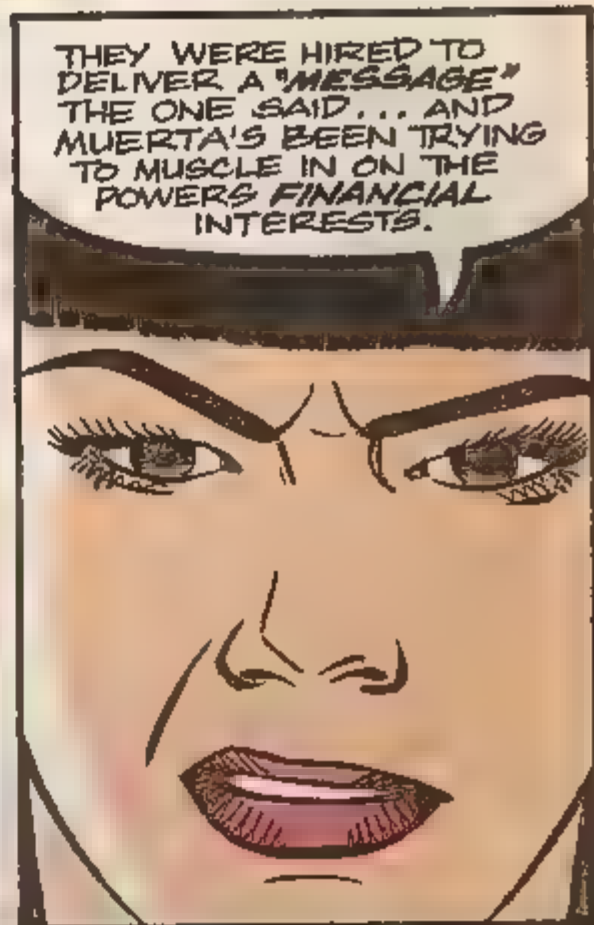
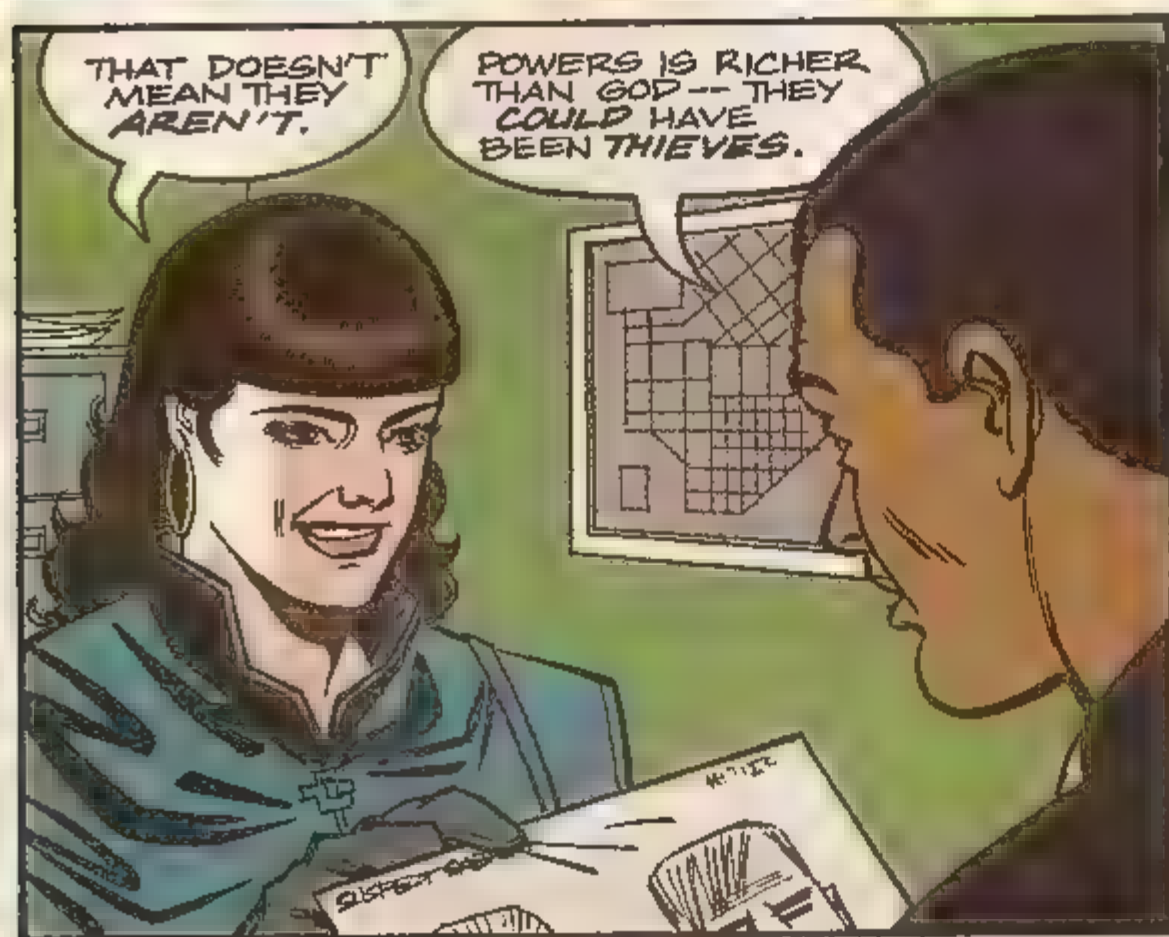
GO THROUGH WITH IT -- FILE FOR DIVORCE. AND YOU NEED TO TAKE PRECAUTIONS ... YOU MAY NEED TIGHTER SECURITY.











HANDS BEHIND YOU. QUICK, NOW...

GO SIT UNDER THAT COCONUT TREE, KONG -- I NEED A MOMENT WITH YOUR BOSS.

ARE YOU NUTS, WOMAN ?!

GUYS KEEP ASKING ME THAT. NOT A SMART QUESTION FOR A GIRL WITH A GUN.

YOUR COMPANY PARKING RAMP REMAINS A WEAK POINT IN YOUR SECURITY SET-UP, DONNIE. GUESS I MUST'VE FORGOT TO POINT THAT OUT WHEN I WAS WORKING FOR YOU...

I ASKED HIM IF HE'D SENT THOSE "SAILORS" TO THE YACHT, LAST NIGHT...

I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT IT, AND I NEVER SAW THESE GUYS.

IF YOU'RE LYING, DONNIE -- IT'S GOING TO BE BON VOYAGE...

MS. TREE -- YOU ARE DEFINITELY CUTE, BUT YOU ARE ONE LADY I GOT NO INTENTION OF SCREWING WITH.

THAT EVENING BILL DROVE ME
TO HIS "LITTLE COTTAGE"
ON THE LAKE.



HIS CHAUFFEUR DROPPED US
OFF; WE'D BE PICKED UP
TOMORROW, MID-MORNING.

EVEN LEFT MY
BEEPER HOME.
HOPE YOU DON'T MIND
BEING STRANDED
WITH ME.

THERE ARE WORSE
FATES. HOW CAN A
BIG SHOT LIKE YOU
AFFORD TO GO
INCOMMUNICADO
LIKE THIS?

CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO,
NOW AND THEN -- FOR MY
SANITY... DAMN!

WHAT'S
WRONG?

LEFT MY KEYS AT THE
OFFICE. HOPE YOU DON'T
MIND BREAKING AND
ENTERING.

ISN'T THERE
AN ALARM
SYSTEM?

ACTUALLY, YES -- BUT IT'S
HOOKED TO THE DOORS. I
KNOW A WINDOW WE CAN
GET IN.

CAREFUL OF THE GLASS! I'LL MAKE A CRIMINAL OUT OF YOU YET.

NOT EXACTLY A WHITE-COLLAR CRIME, IS IT?

BREAK-AND-ENTER OR NOT, IT DIDN'T TAKE US LONG TO MAKE OURSELVES AT HOME...

I THINK I SHOULD HAVE A FRIENDLY LITTLE CHAT WITH YOUR WIFE.

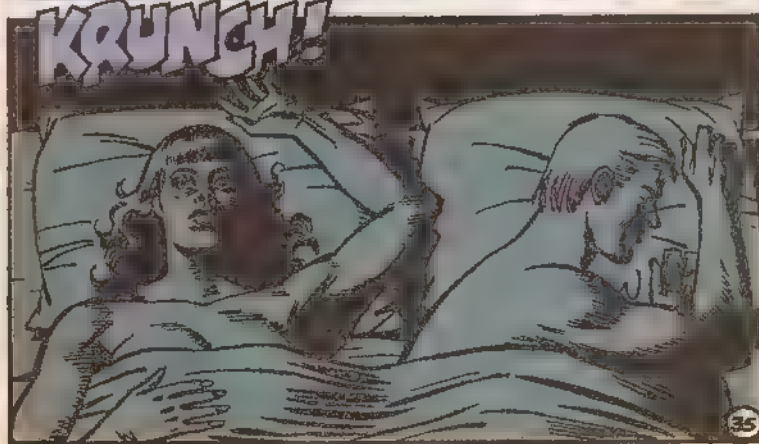
I'D RATHER YOU *DIDN'T*. IN THE FIRST PLACE, YOU BOTH HAVE A TEMPER...

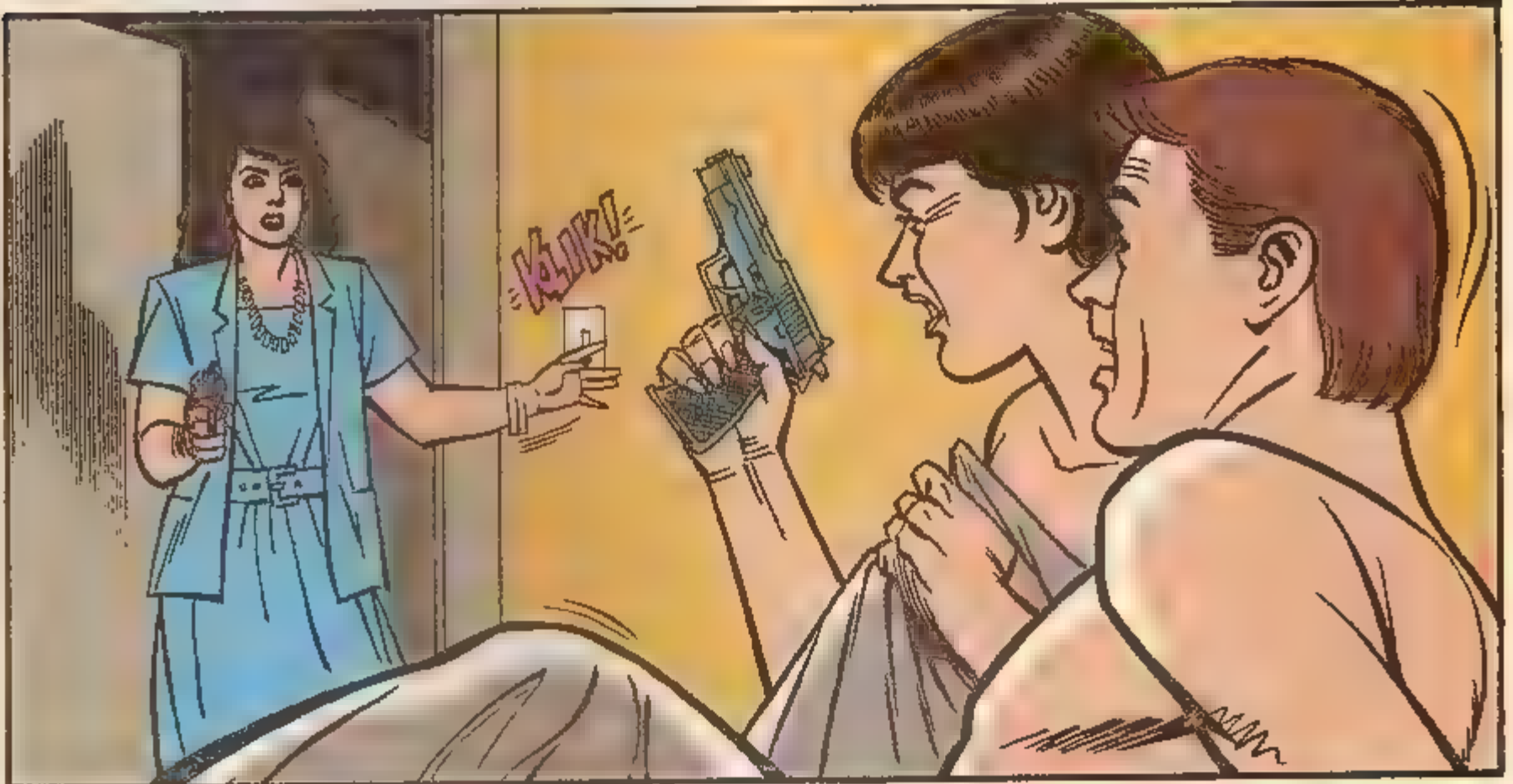
IN THE SECOND, I JUST CAN'T PICTURE MELODIE HIRING THOSE THUGS.

SHE'S BEEN OPERATING IN THE WORLD OF HIGH FINANCE SINCE SHE WAS A KID...

"...HER FATHER WAS AN INDUSTRIALIST, LONG BEFORE YOU EVER WERE... AND THE RICH ALWAYS HAVE A WAY OF FINDING SOMEBODY TO DO THEIR DIRTY WORK FOR THEM."

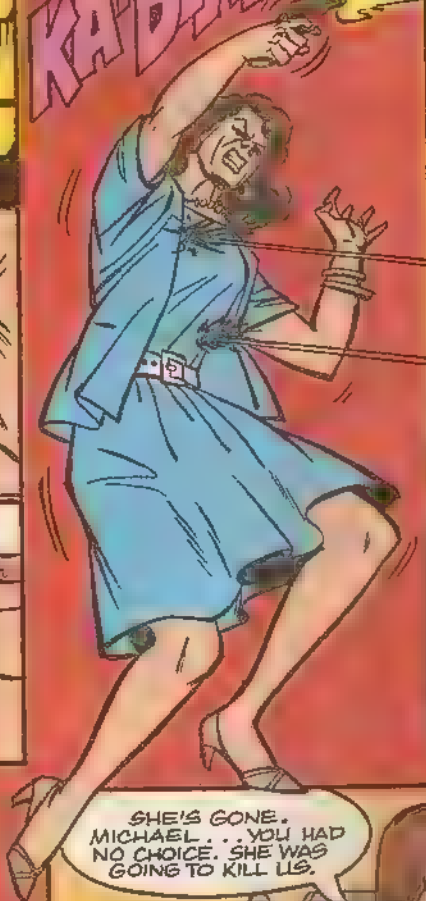
LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT HER ANYMORE. IN FACT, LET'S NOT TALK AT ALL...







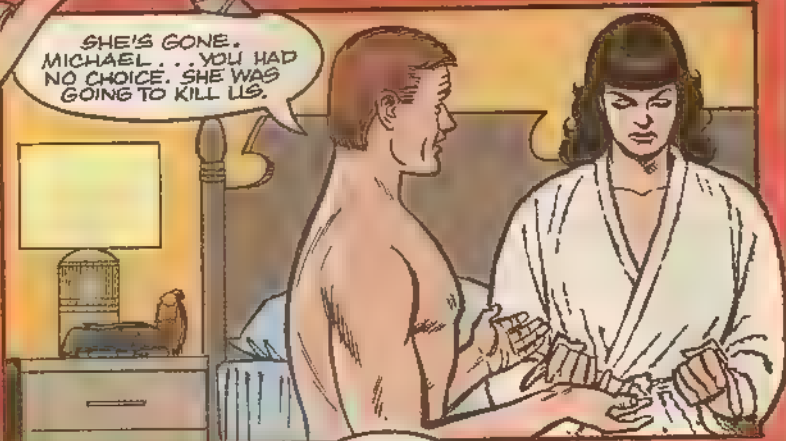
BLAM!
KA-BLAM!



JESUS.

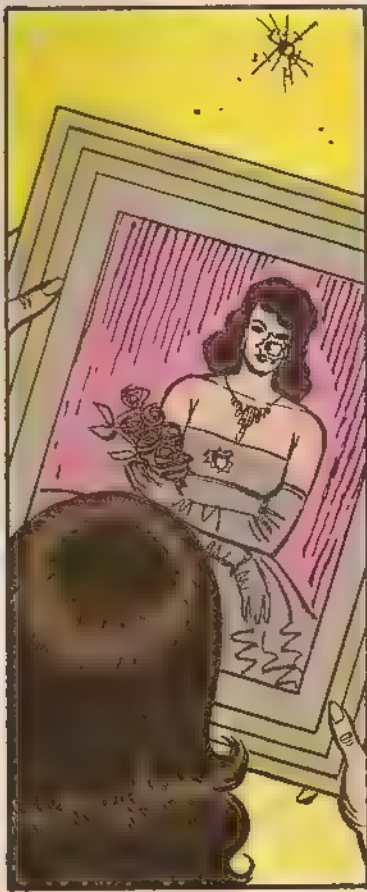
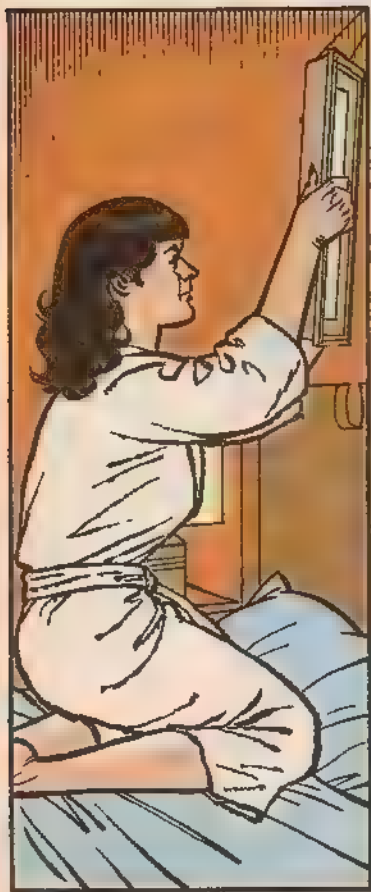
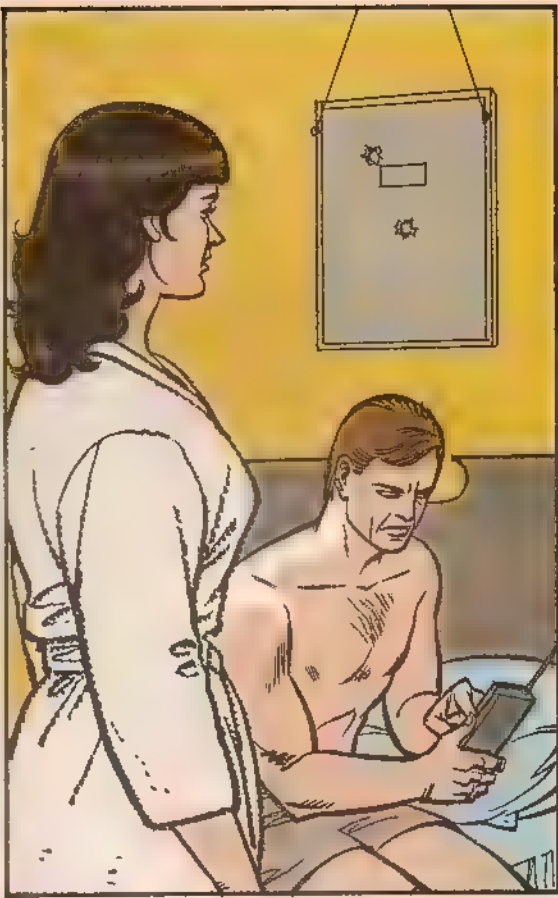
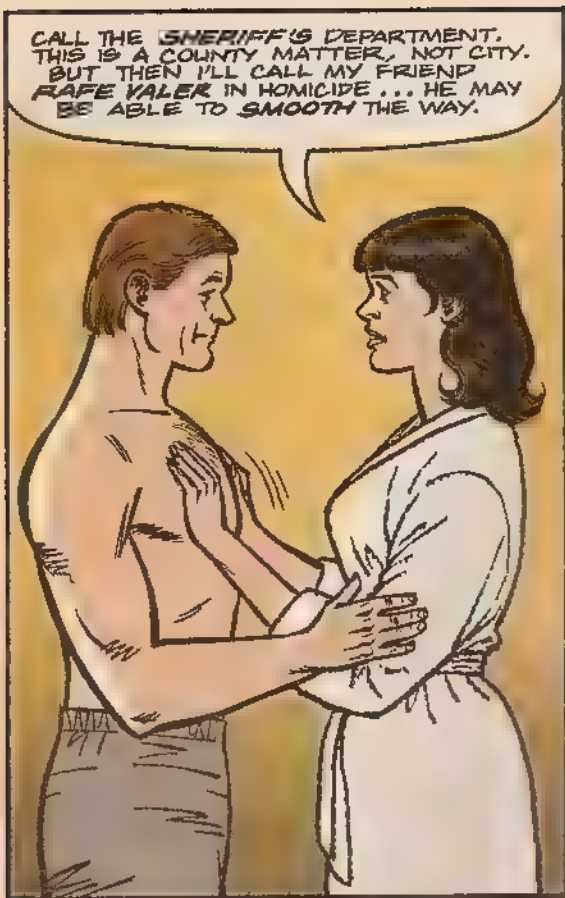
OH
MY LORD.
OH
GOD.

SHE'S GONE.
MICHAEL... YOU HAD
NO CHOICE. SHE WAS
GOING TO KILL US.



DON'T
BLAME
YOURSELF.





SHERIFF'S
DEPT.

ROOM
714

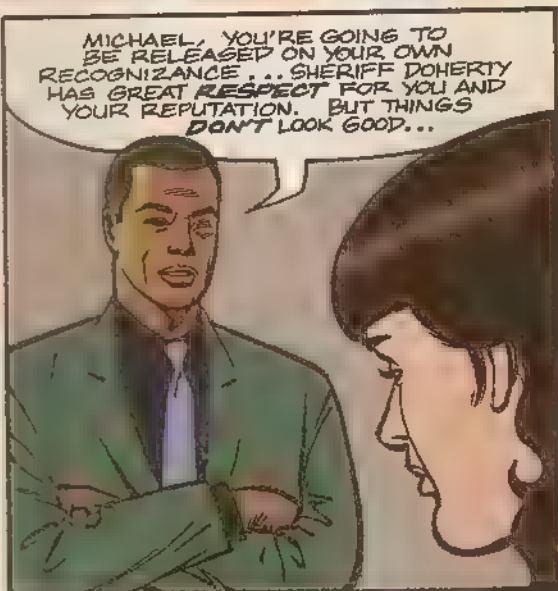
HI, GUESS
IT'S BEEN A LONG
NIGHT FOR
YOU.

LONG ENOUGH. SHERIFF'S
PEOPLE HAVE TREATED ME RIGHT.
THANKS FOR MAKING
THAT CALL.

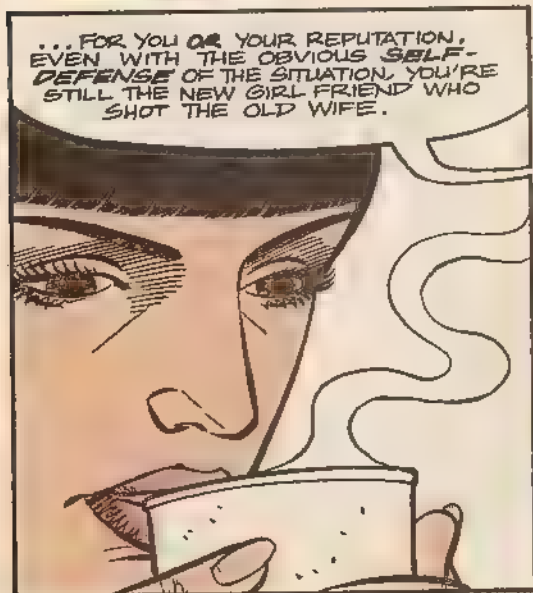
MY PLEASURE. YOU KNOW,
YOU'VE GOTTEN YOURSELF
INTO ALL KINDS OF TROUBLE
... BUT THIS IS A *NEW*
ONE, EVEN FOR YOU.



NOT SO NEW,
REALLY.
OLDER THAN
TIME.



MICHAEL, YOU'RE GOING TO
BE RELEASED ON YOUR OWN
RECOGNIZANCE... SHERIFF DOHERTY
HAS GREAT *RESPECT* FOR YOU AND
YOUR REPUTATION. BUT THINGS
DON'T LOOK GOOD...

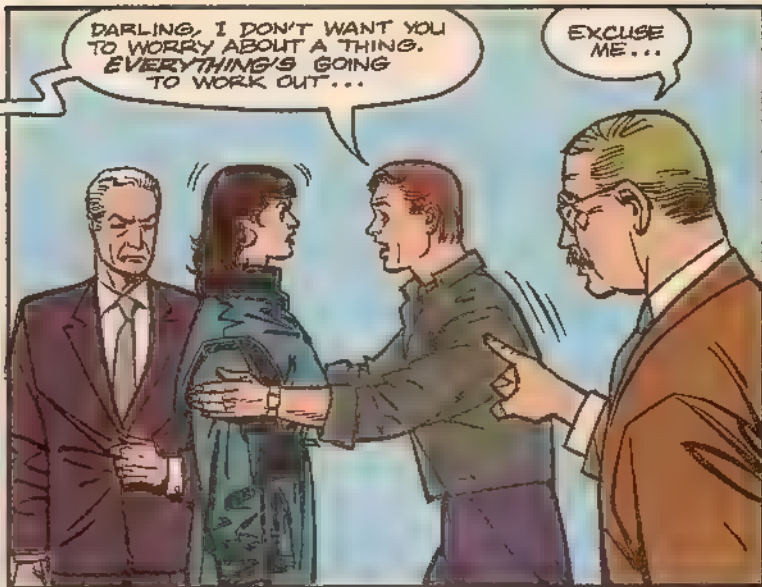


... FOR YOU OR YOUR REPUTATION,
EVEN WITH THE OBVIOUS *SELF-
DEFENSE* OF THE SITUATION, YOU'RE
STILL THE NEW GIRL FRIEND WHO
SHOT THE OLD WIFE.

MY LAWYER'S VIEW WASN'T ANYMORE PLEASANT.

YOU KNOW, POWERS STANDS TO GAIN
FROM ALL THIS... HIS CASH FLOW PROBLEMS
ARE SOLVED BY INHERITING HIS
WIFE'S FORTUNE...





WHEN I GOT BACK TO MY APARTMENT, IT WAS TIME TO GO INTO WORK, BUT I DIDN'T. COULDN'T FACE IT. COULDN'T FACE ANYTHING. I DID SOMETHING I HAVEN'T DONE FOR A LONG TIME...



I SLEPT WELL INTO THE AFTERNOON. BY THE TIME I FINALLY STUMBLED INTO THE OFFICE, THE DAY WAS ALL BUT OVER--NONETHELESS, MY STAFF WAS WAITING FOR ME.

GOOD, YOU'RE HERE.

HUH?

INTO THE CONFERENCE ROOM--NOW.

MY PARTNERS, ROGER FREEMONT AND DAN GREEN, HAD BEEN ON THE CASE ALL DAY, IT SEEMED.

I'VE CHECKED ON THE HEALTH BACKGROUND OF MELODIE POWERS, AND SHE DOES HAVE A HISTORY OF MENTAL ILLNESS.

NOTHING VIOLENT EXACTLY, BUT SHE WAS A NERVOUS, EDGY WOMAN... BAD TEMPER.

I SPOKE TO THE WOMAN'S BEST FRIEND--A GOLD COAST DIVORCEE NAMED JENNIFER REYNOLDS.

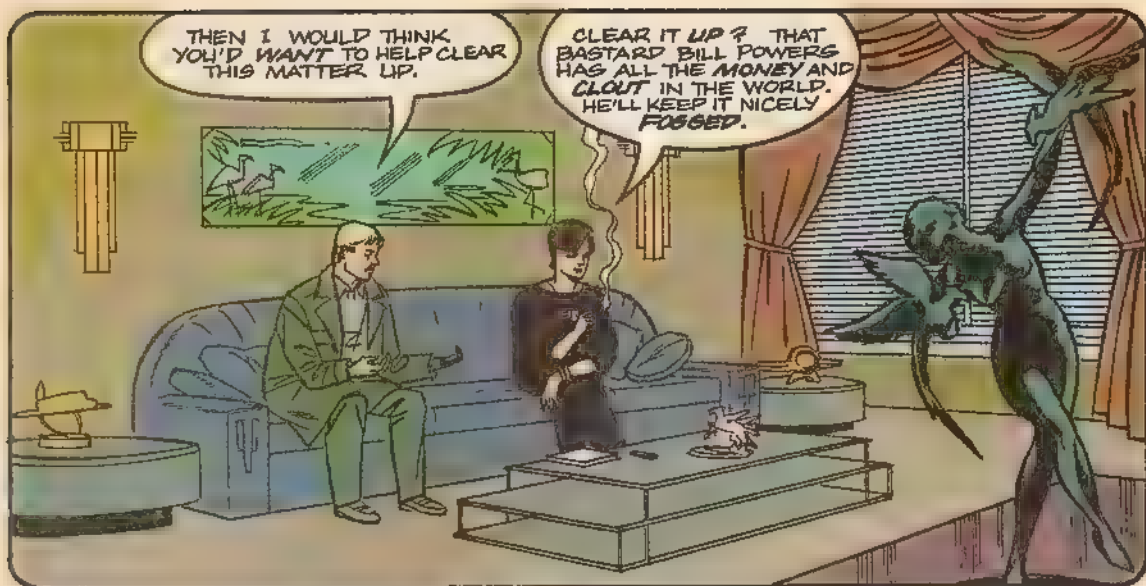
"SHE WAS RELUCTANT TO LET ME IN AT FIRST," DAN SAID.

I TOLD THE OTHER DETECTIVES EVERYTHING I KNOW.

"I DIDN'T CORRECT HER ASSUMPTION I WAS A COP," DAN SAID. "SHE'D HAVE BEEN EVEN LESS FRIENDLY IF SHE KNEW WHO I WORKED FOR."

JUST A FEW FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS, IF YOU DON'T MIND.

I MIND VERY MUCH. MY BEST FRIEND IN THE WORLD IS GONE.



THEN I WOULD THINK YOU'D WANT TO HELP CLEAR THIS MATTER UP.

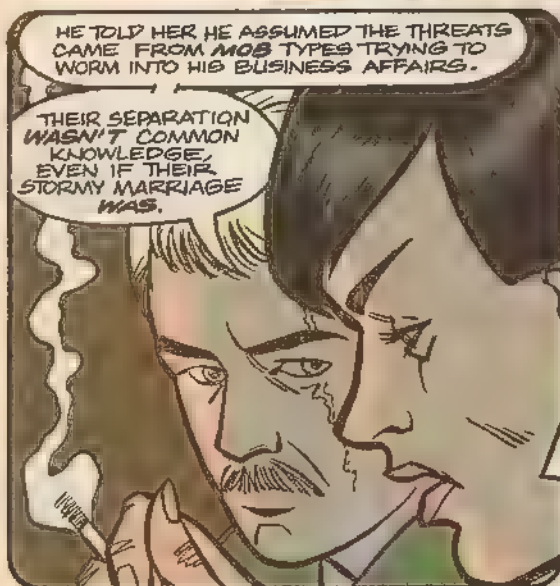
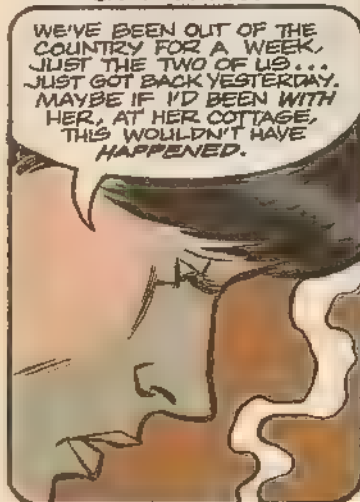
CLEAR IT UP? THAT BASTARD BILL POWERS HAS ALL THE MONEY AND CLOUT IN THE WORLD. HE'LL KEEP IT NICELY FOSSED.

"I KEPT AFTER HER, THOUGH," DAN SAID. "AND SOME INTERESTING THINGS CAME OUT..."

WE'VE BEEN OUT OF THE COUNTRY FOR A WEEK, JUST THE TWO OF US... JUST GOT BACK YESTERDAY. MAYBE IF I'D BEEN WITH HER, AT HER COTTAGE, THIS WOULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED.

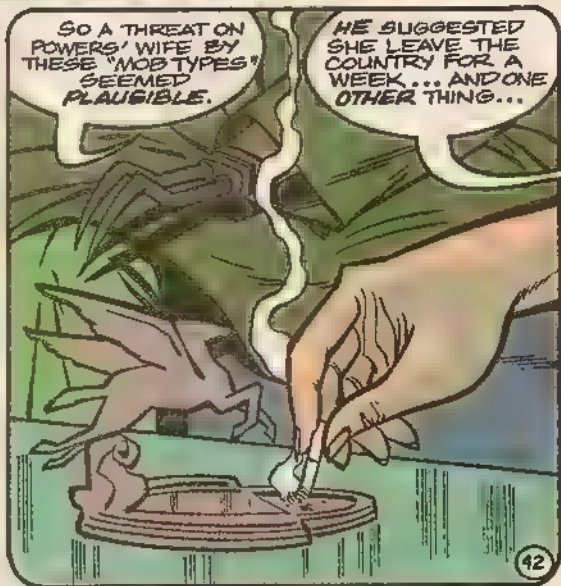
OUT OF THE COUNTRY?

YES, YOU SEE, THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL UNPLEASANT, THREATENING CALLS. SHE WAS AFRAID. SHE'D SPOKEN TO HER HUSBAND ABOUT IT.



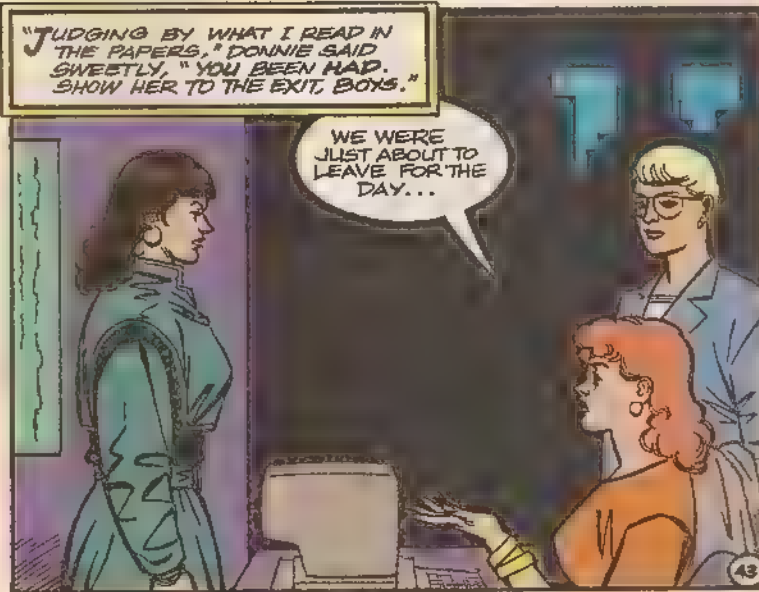
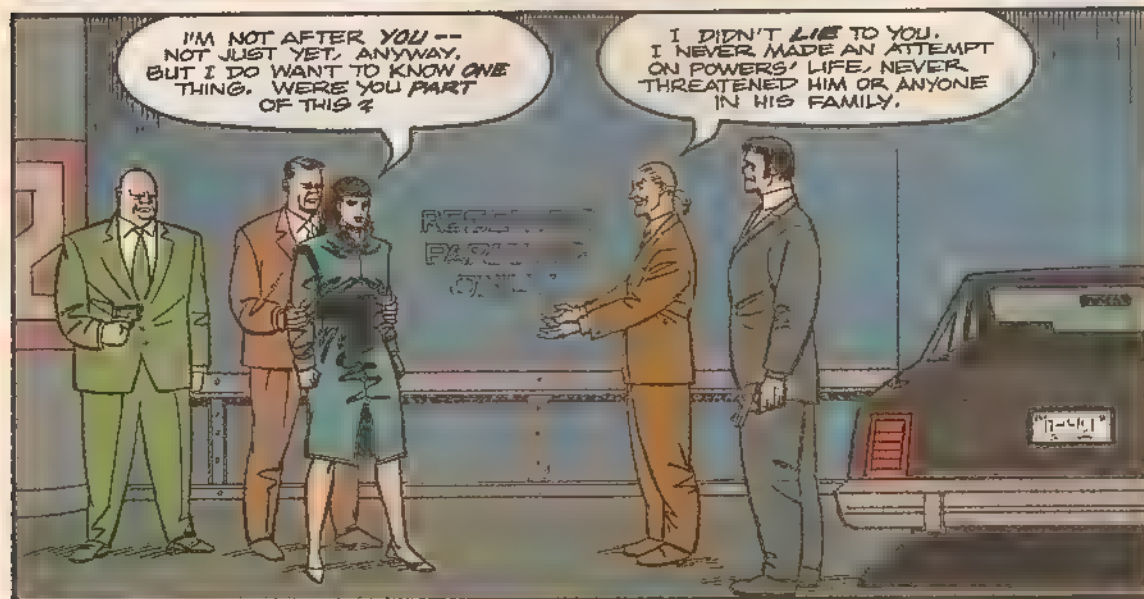
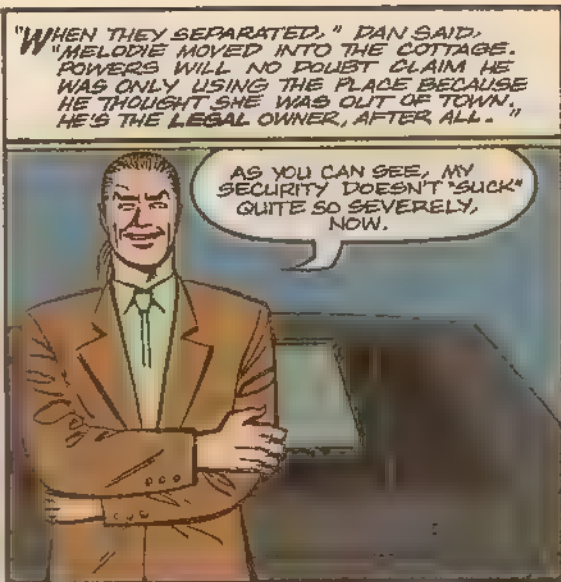
HE TOLD HER HE ASSUMED THE THREATS CAME FROM MOB TYPES TRYING TO WORM INTO HIS BUSINESS AFFAIRS.

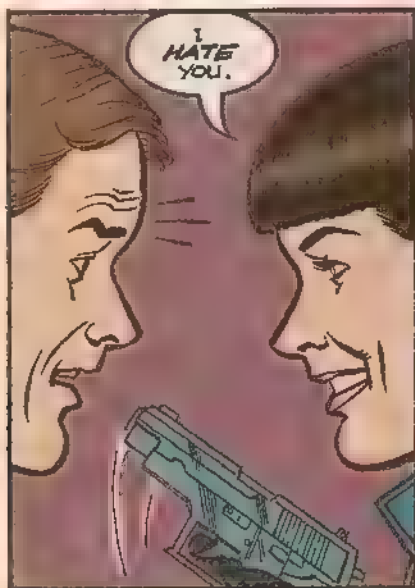
THEIR SEPARATION WASN'T COMMON KNOWLEDGE, EVEN IF THEIR STORMY MARRIAGE WAS.

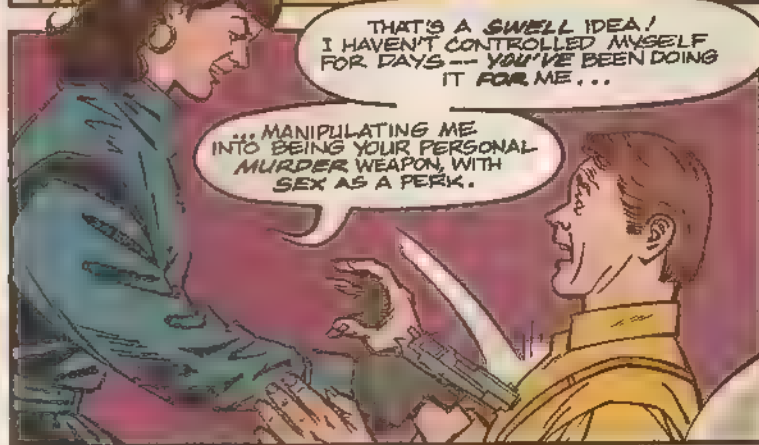
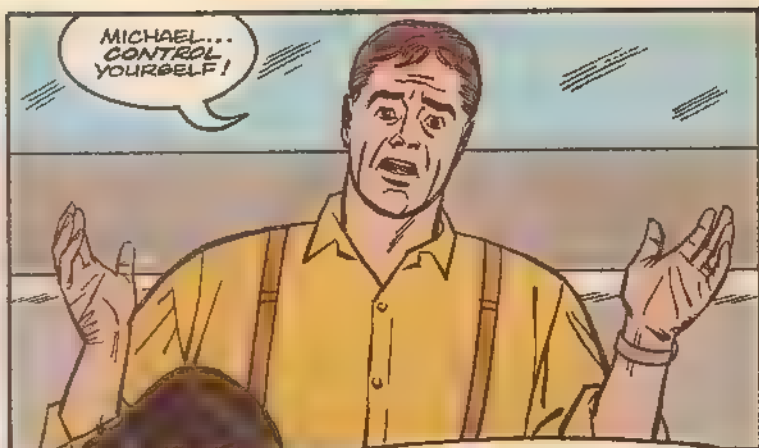


SO A THREAT ON POWERS' WIFE BY THESE 'MOB TYPES' SEEMED PLAUSIBLE.

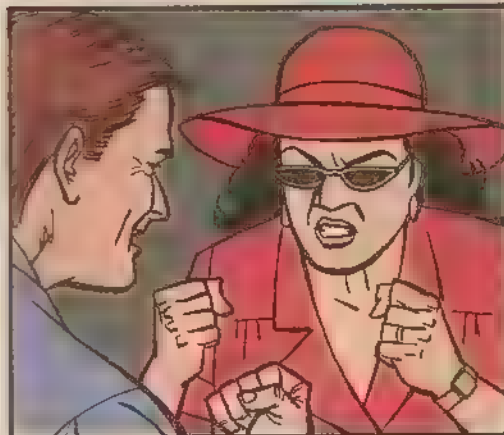
HE SUGGESTED SHE LEAVE THE COUNTRY FOR A WEEK... AND ONE OTHER THING...



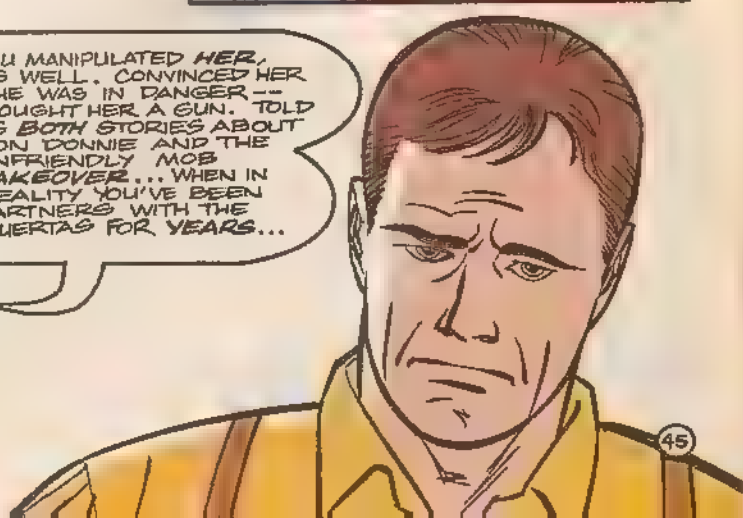




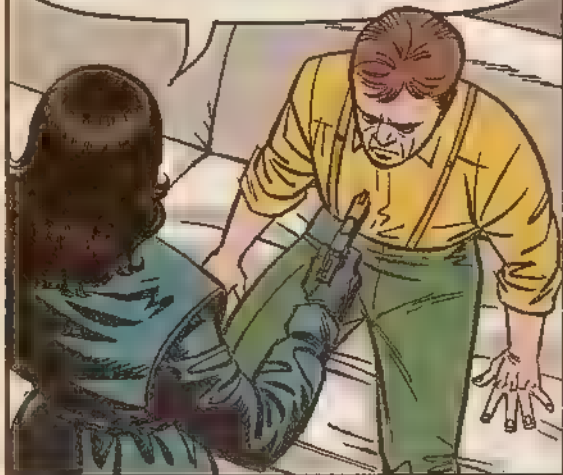
"YOU WERE AT THE NORTHSHIRE INN BECAUSE I WAS THERE, THE 'ARGUMENT' YOU HAD WITH YOUR 'WIFE' WAS STAGED... I DON'T KNOW WHO PLAYED YOUR WIFE, IN SUNGLASSES AND BIG HAT. BUT MELODIE WAS OUT OF THE COUNTRY AT THE TIME."



YOU MANIPULATED HER, AS WELL. CONVINCED HER SHE WAS IN DANGER -- BOUGHT HER A GUN. TOLD US BOTH STORIES ABOUT DON DONNIE AND THE UNFRIENDLY MOB TAKEOVER... WHEN IN REALITY YOU'VE BEEN PARTNERS WITH THE MUERTAS FOR YEARS...



THAT COTTAGE WAS WHERE MELODIE WAS LIVING. DURING THE SEPARATION, BUT FEW PEOPLE KNEW THAT. YOU MADE SURE THERE WAS NO CAR IN FRONT, HAVING YOUR CHAUFFEUR DROP US OFF.



"YOU 'FORGOT' YOUR KEYS... WE BROKE A WINDOW AND WENT IN, SO THAT MELODIE COULD COME HOME AND DISCOVER WHAT SEEMED TO BE EVIDENCE OF A **BURGLAR'S PRESENCE**..."



YOU FILLED ME WITH STORIES OF YOUR **VIOLENT, PARANOID WIFE**—MANEUVERING ME INTO WARNING YOU OF HOW **DANGEROUS** SHE MIGHT BE. ALL THE WHILE SETTING ME UP TO PULL THE TRIGGER.



YOU KNEW SO MUCH ABOUT ME. YOU KNEW HOW CRAZY I WAS ABOUT YOU, WHEN WE WERE KIDS. YOU KNEW HOW CRAZY I WAS, PERIOD. YOU TOOK ADVANTAGE OF MY EVERY WEAKNESS.



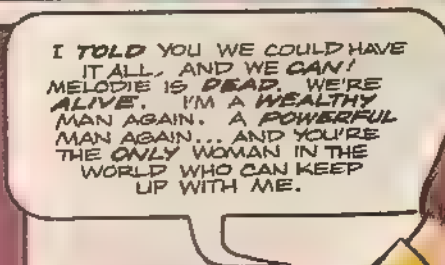
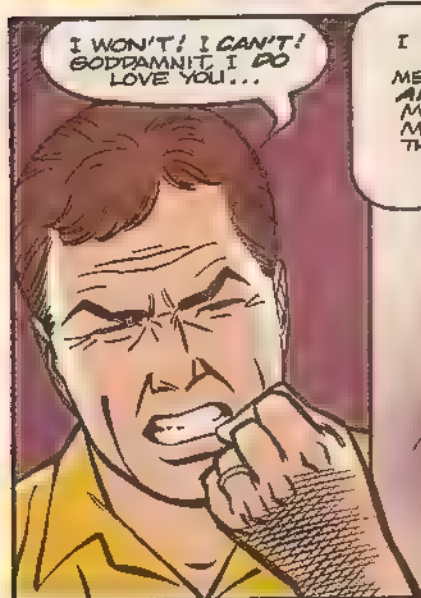
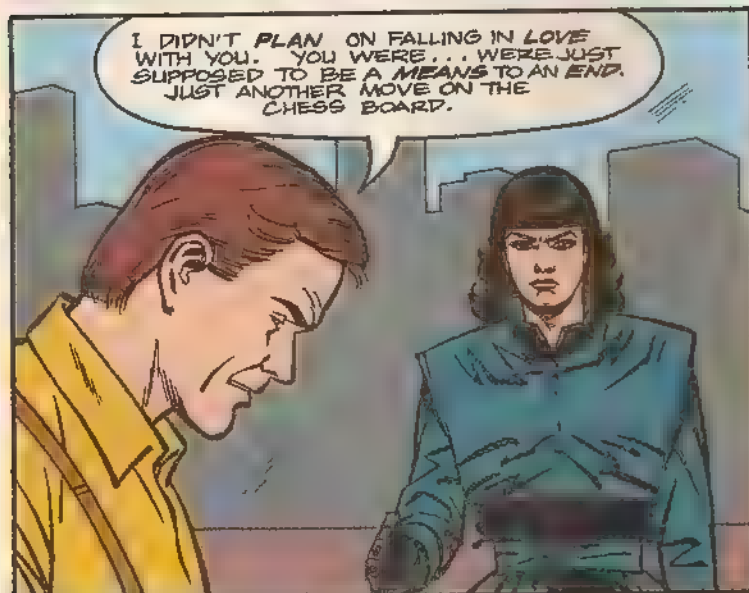
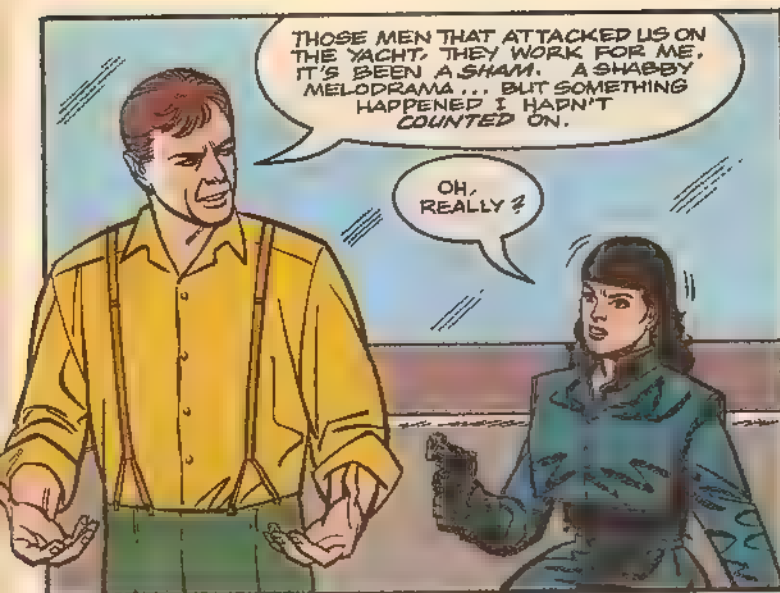
OF COURSE, ONE OF MY WEAKNESSES IS A **STRENGTH**, OF SORTS... I'M A **HELL OF AN EXECUTIONER**. THAT'S WHAT YOU SAW IN ME, AFTER ALL, ISN'T IT?

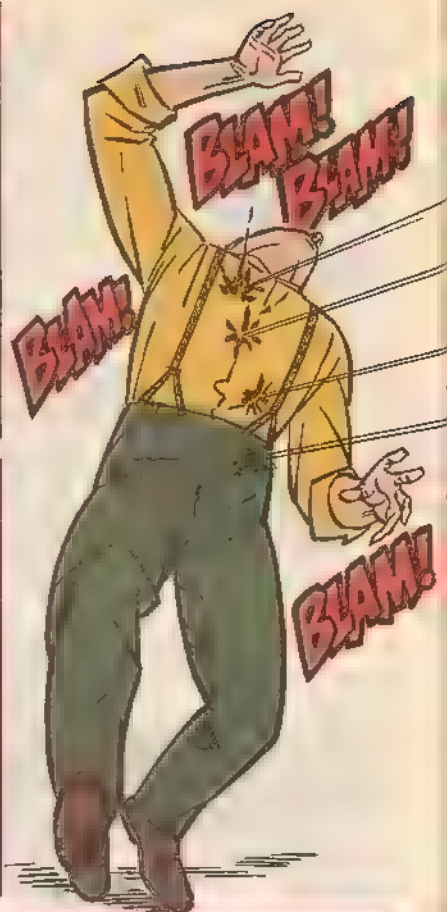
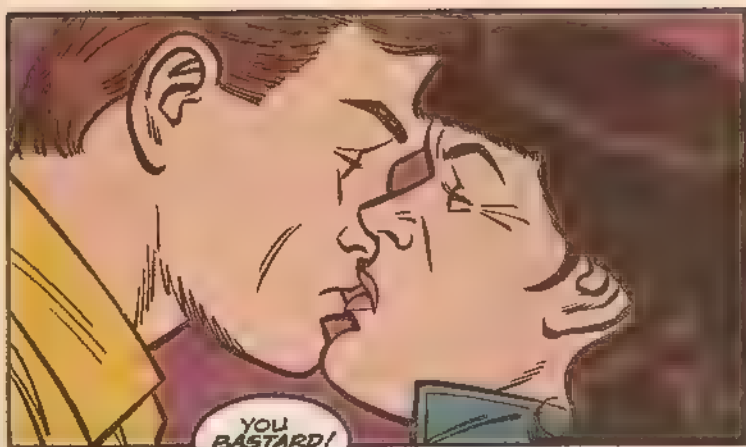
MICHAEL...
NO...
DON'T...



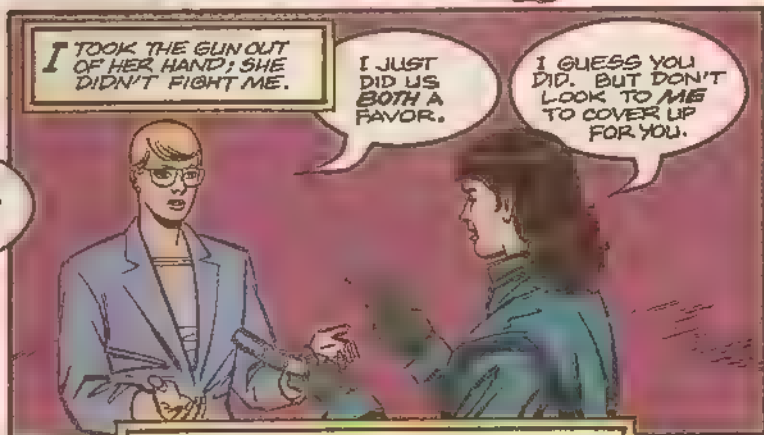
I'M NOT GOING TO LIE TO YOU ANYMORE. IT'S **TRUE**. ALL OF IT. I... I SEDUCED YOU, COUNTING ON YOUR LONG-AGO AFFECTION FOR ME. I **DID** IT. I... I USED YOU TO GET RID OF MY WIFE.





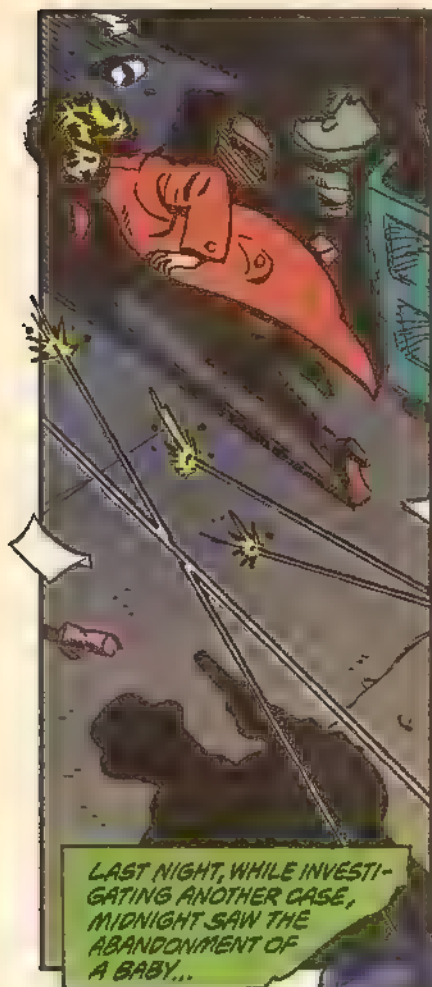


HIS EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT
HAD DROPPED BY:
LINDA DECAMD.



"I PULLED THE TRIGGER," I SAID, "BUT YOU'RE THE BITCH WHO HELPED BILLY POWERS KILL HIS WIFE."





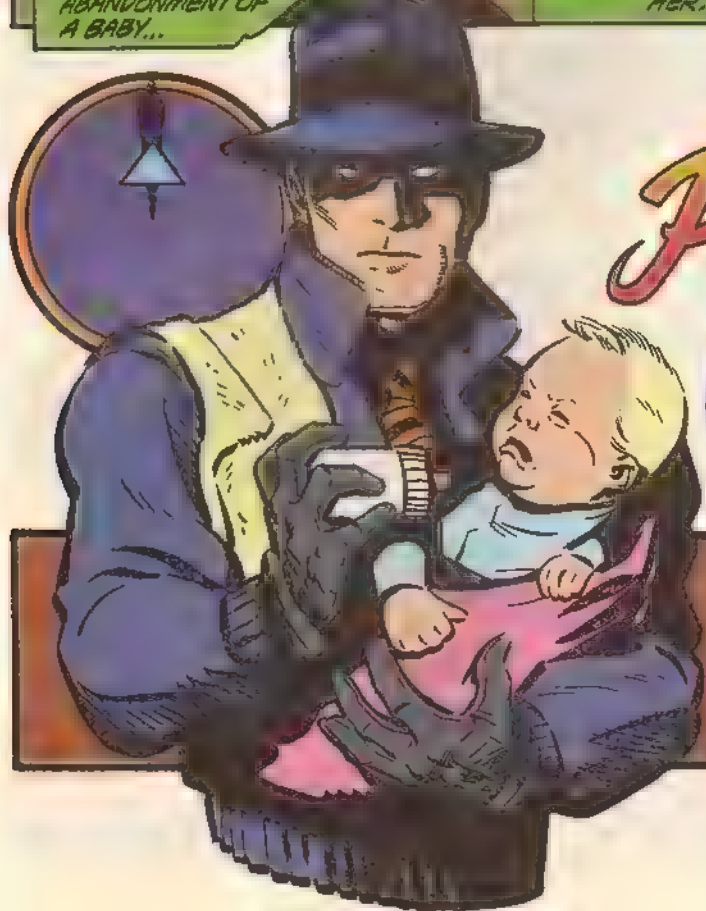
LAST NIGHT, WHILE INVESTIGATING ANOTHER CASE, MIDNIGHT SAW THE ABANDONMENT OF A BABY...



SO MIDNIGHT TOOK THE BABY HOME TO PROTECT HER...

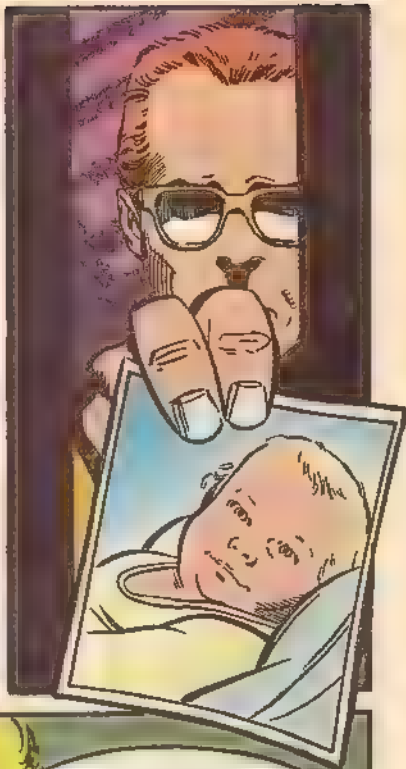
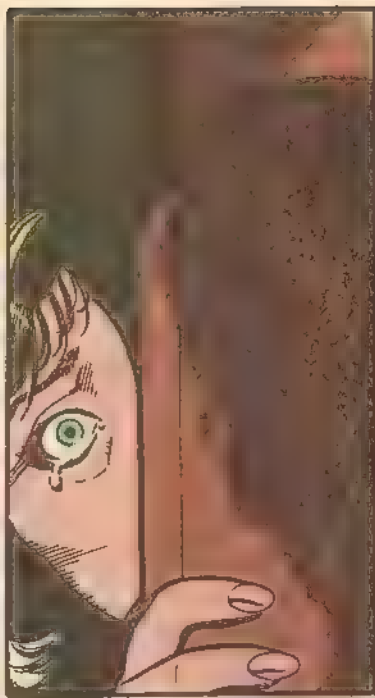


... BUT NOW IT'S MORNING AND MIDNIGHT WANTS TO GIVE THE BABY BACK...



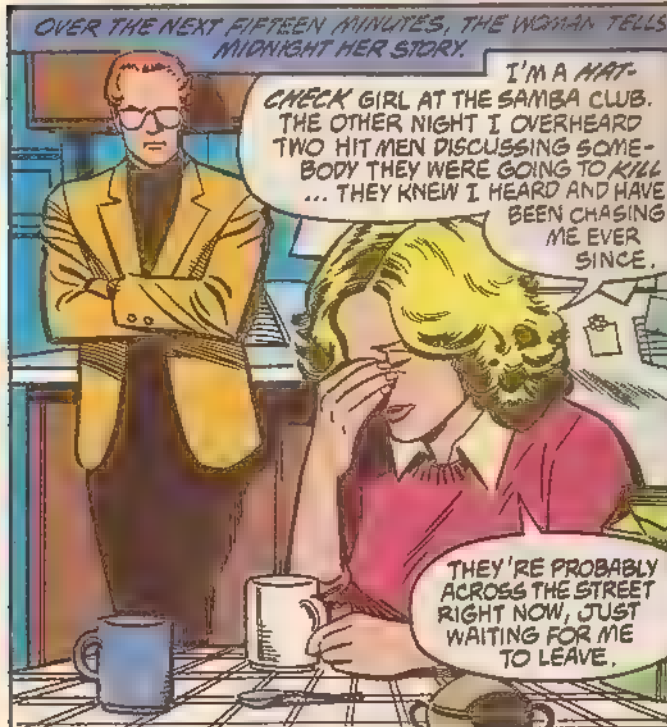
Papa MIDNIGHT

ED GORMAN • story
RICK BURCHETT • art
SAM PERSING • colors
JOHN COSTANZA • letters
KATIE MAIN • editor



YOU HAVE CINDY!
I ONLY LEFT HER THERE
BECAUSE I WAS AFRAID
SHE'D BE *KILLED* IF
THOSE MEN MANAGED
TO SHOOT ME.

OVER THE NEXT FIFTEEN MINUTES, THE WOMAN TELLS
MIDNIGHT HER STORY.



I'M A *HAT-
CHECK* GIRL AT THE SAMBA CLUB.
THE OTHER NIGHT I OVERHEARD
TWO HIT MEN DISCUSSING SOME-
BODY THEY WERE GOING TO *KILL*
... THEY KNEW I HEARD AND HAVE
BEEN CHASING
ME EVER
SINCE.

THEY'RE PROBABLY
ACROSS THE STREET
RIGHT NOW, JUST
WAITING FOR ME
TO LEAVE.



IF I TRY TO GO
TO THE POLICE,
THEY'LL JUST
DENY IT. I DON'T
HAVE ANY
PROOF.

MIDNIGHT SPENDS THE REST OF THE DAY IN THE APARTMENT WITH THE FRIGHTENED WOMAN. THEN AT NIGHT HE SLIPS INTO THE BATHROOM...

WHY, YOU'RE MIDNIGHT!?

NOW THAT IT'S NIGHT, MIDNIGHT IS COUNTING ON THE MEN TO MAKE THEIR MOVE... BUT NOT BEFORE HE DOES.



EVEN HIT-MEN GET SENTIMENTAL ABOUT CERTAIN HITS, THAT IS...

SO WHILE I WAS STRANGLIN' THE BITCH, YOU KNOW WHAT HER LITTLE PEKINESE DID?

WHAT?

COME UP AND BIT ME RIGHT ON THE ASS!



I GUESS THE ONE I'LL ALWAYS REMEMBER IS WHEN I SHOT THAT NUN.

YEAH, I HEARD SHE BLED ALL OVER THE PLACE.

IT'S 'CAUSE SHE COULDN'T GET UP OUT OF HER WHEEL-CHAIR.

OH, MAN, THAT'S A CLASSIC.



THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT, MIDNIGHT CHECKED ON HOW THE HITMEN DID BUSINESS. EVERY HOUR OR SO, THEY TOOK TURNS GOING DOWN TO THE CORNER TO GET COFFEE.

YOU WANT REGULAR?

YEAH, BLACK.

SEE YOU IN A FEW MINUTES.

LOOK AT THAT HAIR-- HE LOOKS LIKE A GODDAMN WOMAN.

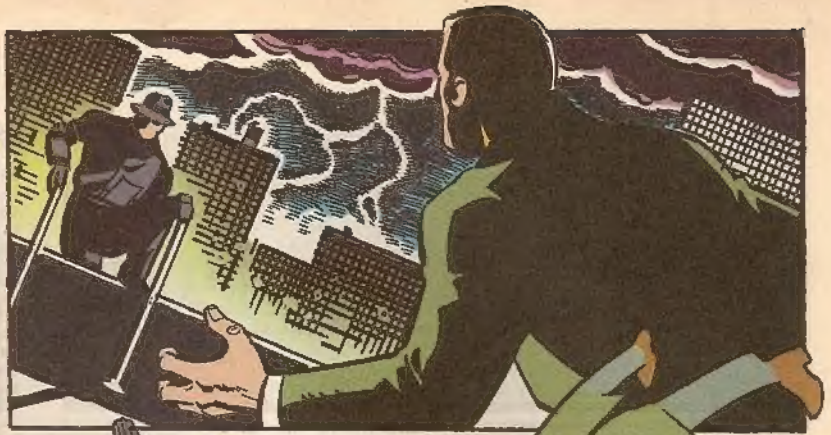
HEY, BABE, TWO COFFEES. BLACK.

EAT-RITE

GEEZ, WHAT A GREAT NIGHT FOR A HIT!

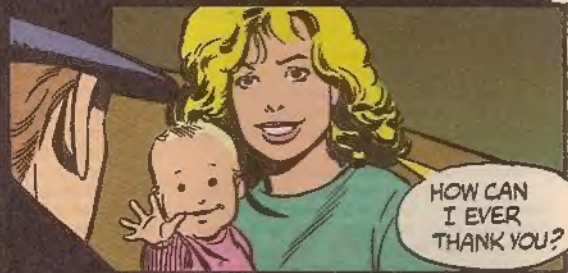






AIN'T THAT D'ANGELO?
JEEZ, THAT'S THE
EASIEST COLLAR I EVER
MADE. HOW ABOUT YOU?

WISH THEY
WERE ALL LIKE
THIS.



HOW CAN
I EVER
THANK YOU?

MAYBE SOME DAY
MIDNIGHT WILL HAVE A
WIFE AND CHILD OF
HIS OWN.

BECAUSE THE NIGHTS
HAVE A WAY OF
GETTING LONG AND
LOVELY...



MS. TREE

DC COMICS INC.
666 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10103

JENETTE KAHN, President & Editor-in-Chief
DICK GIORDANO, VP-Editorial Director
MIKE GOLD, Editor
KATIE MAIN, Associate Editor
JIM CHADWICK, Director-Design Services
JOE ORLANDO, VP-Creative Director
PAUL LEVITZ, Executive VP & Publisher
BRUCE BRISTOW, VP-Sales & Marketing
PATRICK CALDON, VP & Controller
TERRI CUNNINGHAM, Dir.-Editorial Administration
CHANTAL D'AULNIS, VP-Business Affairs
LILLIAN LASERSON, VP-Legal Affairs
MATTHEW RAGONE, Circulation Director
BOB ROZAKIS, Production Director

He's ba-a-a-a-c-k!

Yes, after three issues of silence, I am back—Max Allan Collins his own sweet good-natured self—at the helm of SWAK. Logistical and other problems have kept me from putting together the previous DC SWAK columns, but after last issue's installment—which included several letters I felt I had to respond to—I insisted we get back on track, and Mike Gold (as usual) came through.

Before I belatedly respond to several of last issue's letters, and way before we dig into this issue's letters, I would like to ask any SWAK contributors to please write (and mail) your missives ASAP, after reading a current issue. Our readers seem to think our quarterly schedule means that they can be leisurely about sending their SWAK contributions; not so—deadlines at DC come much sooner than back in MS. TREE's independent days. (Just ask Terry Beatty!) Note that many of the letters below refer to issue #2. Get your letters about #4 out right now! What are you waiting for? Drop everything!

We'll wait for you.

Dum de dum dum. Dum de dum dum dum. Back already? Great! While you were gone, we all hummed the *Dragnet* theme.

Now to last issue's letters.

Fred Averick, a previous SWAK respondent, wants to see me back writing this column. You get your wish, Fred! Now, what in the hell is the idea of saying *Midnight* "sucks"—do you eat with that mouth? When you come in my house, wipe off your feet and behave yourself. And if you think something "sucks," I expect you to at least spell it out with some examples. (I like Ed Gorman's *Midnight* and think it's a neat back-up feature—a nice combo of noir detection and *Batman*-school super-hero.)

Another SWAK veteran, David Malcolm Porta, alleges that the character Janichek in "The Devil's Punchbowl" is a re-fry of B. Lyle Layman from the *WILD DOG* serial (in *ACTION COMICS WEEKLY*), "Moral Stand." In the first place, to expect a writer not to have recurring motifs, themes and even character types is ludicrous. In the second place, Janichek and Layman have almost nothing in common as characters other than hypocrisy—the former is a church leader and businessman in a small community, the latter is a demagogue heading up a nation-wide movement. I never used the term "fundamentalist" in "The Devil's Punchbowl" to describe Janichek or the small-town church. You're reading in.

There was a smug, condescending tone in many of the letters last issue. Let's get this straight: I'm in

charge of the smug condescension around here!

Dear Tree Surgeons:

MS. TREE QUARTERLY #2 was a nice mixed bag of stuff.

Midnight was really gritty, a tense story, and the bastards got theirs but good.

This is my first impression of the controversial *The Butcher*, who I understand has been roasted in fanzines for being all violence and no thought. Well, if that's true, the narrative style of the story softened him up. He seems like a rather complex character, a 20th-Century Scalp Hunter.

I'm strongly in favor of continuing narrative prose stories with numerous characters. Also, give us a too sweet pairing of Ms. Tree and Wild Dog. Heck, maybe they'll get married.

The main story—it was good until the revelation of the culprit, which was the "easy way out" and running a little too much towards the author's own liberal biases. The citizens' committees aren't ALWAYS the villains, and these records are getting to be too much even for the record companies!

But it was a well-crafted story. What appeared to be a simple, one-dimensional case swelled up into something with at least half a dozen logical suspects. So few current writers even know HOW to write mysteries these days. Max Collins has the advantage over so many in this respect. I don't think he'll ever write a dull story.

Also, thanks for including Ed Debevic's Diner in the story. I ate there on a visit to Chicago and it's even more of a madhouse than you made it appear. Also the noise level of an atomic testing site. Great place. Love Bosco and Purple Cows. With or without the sex organs.

Charles D. Brown
39 Stockton Street
Brentwood, NY 11717

Charles Brown is new to SWAK, but not to me; Charles has been a great friend to the *DICK TRACY* strip for years now, sending along useful clippings of crimes and Crimestopper-type items.

Both Terry and I are Ed Debevic's Diner fans, but I think it was Terry's idea to use it in the story; it was my idea, on the other hand, to depict the woman gagging as she was about to bite into a burger while reporter Rich Eldridge discussed the eating habits of blowflies.

Charles, maybe "The Devil's Punchbowl" does reveal my own "liberal biases." But who else's biases do you expect a story to reveal? Fiction isn't created in a vacuum—it better grow out of the author's beliefs and thoughts and even biases, or what value does it have as self-expression?

The other day I told Mike Gold that I didn't consider myself either liberal or conservative; that I stood in the middle of the road, where people from both directions could get an equal shot at running me down.

Mike's comment was that I wasn't just standing in the middle of the road—I was jumping up and down in it, like a crazy person.

Dear People,

I've been reading MS. TREE since it first came out. I've never had any complaints with the stories or the art. But (here it comes), I do have some complaints with issue #2 of MS. TREE QUARTERLY. I did think that the subject matter would make an interesting story. This is, of course, before I read it. I am also a fan of Mr. Collins's mysteries; I find them very well researched. Researched is the key word here. This is why I was very surprised by reading MTQ #2. Did Mr. Collins watch an episode of *Geraldo*?

I am a fan of music in general as well as a fan of heavy metal, and I am not a Satan worshiper in any sense of the word. I also know a lot of people who are God-Goddess worshipers who worship out-doors, some in the ways that were described in MTQ #2, and none of them are Satan worshipers either.

I found MTQ #2 to be very poorly written as a whole. To be honest with you, I was quite insulted by it.

David Burton
P.O. Box 4432
Manchester, NH 03108

David, I did scads of research on Satanism and Paganism for "The Devil's Punchbowl" (although I never made it through *Geraldo*'s special). I think the story is clearly a freedom of speech tale. If you think an old rock 'n' roller like me (who probably was performing heavy-metal music before you were born) would in any way be pro-record burning/banning, you're just not paying attention.

Try reading the issue again—backwards.

Dear Mike, Max and Terry,

I found the first MS. TREE QUARTERLY to be an intriguing, intelligent book, and purchased the second. At first I was extremely disappointed; the characterization and stereotypes were ridiculous (which spelled backward for Satanic content is ludicrous). Then comes the plot twist...perhaps this was done to show that "You can't judge a book by its cover," thus explaining the wildly exaggerated stereotypes. I, for one, have been listening to groups with names like Faith No More and Black Sabbath for years and have yet to sacrifice anything (besides the occasional pizza to the Gods of Hunger).

The plot twist also provided another angle: the dangers of fanaticism. There is nothing as terrifying as someone with a divine mission to fulfill. From the massacre of Moslems and Jews in the crusades to Guyana, holy missions have had grim effects. Even Hitler declared that Nazism was not a political party, "rather, we are a religion." This fanatical Aryan racist "religion" resulted in the greatest tragedy of our century, the slaughtering of six million people. Believe me, I am a lot less frightened of people listening to bands with names like NATAS and Ludi-Christ than those burning their records.

And so, your book, at first seemingly mediocre, evolves into something extremely thought provoking. There's no room to complain.

Doyle Stevick
211 W. Foster Ave., Apt. 11
Penn State University
State College, PA 16801

Everybody,

Once again, MS. TREE QUARTERLY #3 was a good, solid read. The "Gay Bashing" story was quite honest. It doesn't seem there are good guys on either side. Unfortunately, life is often like this. I applaud Collins and Beatty for tackling such a difficult story.

I really enjoy the text stories. The Butcher conclusion was awesome. I just can't get enough of Pensa's art.

Todd D. Atteberry
1460 N. First St. #37
Salinas, CA 93906

Unfortunately, Todd, the text stories have been dropped from MS. TREE, for production reasons more than anything else. I was supposed to write at least one of them myself—a WILD DOG tale. Too bad. But we're strongly considering a MS. TREE MEETS WILD DOG story.

Dear Max and Terry,

"Skeleton in the Closet" was going very well until the last couple of pages. The revelation of Mr. Hand's homosexuality was too convenient and too quick an answer to Mike Junior's homophobia. Whatever his feelings' origins, it was clear that Mike has, at gut level, a funny feeling about his gay fellow human beings, and the implication that suddenly finding out someone he knew to be an okay guy was in fact, all these years, gay, would automatically change those feelings is almost insulting.

Nevertheless, this was otherwise an excellent story. Typical (without actually mentioning AIDS), entertaining, and involving this cast whom we know and love on professional and personal levels. Anything controversial makes everyone take sides, and, sadly, the rights of homosexuals remain controversial, argued over. (I wonder if you'll get any correspondence that condemns your 'tolerant preaching,' or something?) You also highlighted the fact that in any minority grouping, there will be a subsection whose way of expressing themselves tends to bring down on their friends exactly the sort of condemnation they're fighting against, as demonstrated here by the clichéd black-leather wearers.

Following up that story with another whose opening page had a woman spread-eagled in a bra and pants with the zip

undone was not a good idea. Cannibalism is, I'm sure, a fine subject or theme for a story, and the tale worked well, if weirdly, but I think comics should be careful not to have images of women that, without the pertinent wound or bullet hole or whatever, would look sexually enticing.

Malcolm Bourne
2 & 4 Bye Rd.
Shuttleworth, Ramsbottom
Bury, Lancashire BLO 0HH
England

Malcolm, I remember stating in past SWAKs—or at least strongly implying, and on more than one occasion—that a member of the MS. TREE cast was gay, but that until the context of a specific story made the revelation meaningful or at least pertinent, I wouldn't get into each and every character's private sex life. I am neither in the pandering nor the role-model business.

As for the glibness of Mike's reevaluating his feelings about gays due to Mr. Hand's revelation, sure; real life isn't that tidy. The last time I looked, MS. TREE was a comic book—a melodrama. We paint in broader strokes than real life, or, for that matter, a prose novel.

On the other hand, I don't think Mike "changes" his feelings about gays. I think he balances his bias against gays for his love for father-figure Mr. Hand, and Mr. Hand (not gays) comes out the victor. But accepting Mr. Hand for who and what he is will help Mike toward an overall healthier, more tolerant view.

Dear Max, Mike, and Katie,

How is it I knew, after seeing his reappearance on page 33, that, before the story was over, Mr. Hand would turn out to be gay? I hope his being gay wasn't some spur of the moment thing.

When you and Terry were creating Ms. Tree, was it a conscious effort not to make her a smoker? I ask because it seems like every private eye ever created is either a smoker or used to be one.

Did you catch that report on Bobby Darin in a recent "Entertainment Tonight"? They mentioned a movie on his life in the works. Who do you think should play Bobby? I think he should either be played by his son (who's a dead ringer) or Julian Lennon.

In the recent Hollywood story-line in DICK TRACY, why did you bring Mumbles back? Didn't he drown in his first and only go at Tracy?

Delmo (the Saint) Walters Jr.
1299 Grand Concourse
Bronx, NY 10452

Delmo, as I mentioned above to Malcolm, I've known for a long, long time that Mr. Hand is gay. It's something I intended to pay off when the time came. And it wasn't easy, hitting my tongue about the subject, when Terry and I were taking heat in two national magazine articles by Andy Mangels, about our supposed homophobia.

I just didn't think smoking was a habit Ms. Tree would acquire—she's too smart, and too physically fit. I have tended to avoid having my main characters smoke ever since (many years ago) Don Thompson chided me in a review of my first novel, BAIT MONEY, for practically giving the reader emphysema, what

with the protagonist Nolan's constant tough-gay lighting-up. In my next novel, Nolan quit smoking.

New readers curious about Delmo's Bobby Darin question are hereby informed that I am the late singer's self-appointed Number One Fan, a fact well known to veteran SWAKsters. I think Harry Connick, Jr., is the man to play Darin—he's already doing Darin, after all; young, cocky, brash, and good. Connick isn't nearly the songwriter Darin was, however.

Mumbles reappeared in a 1979 TRACY continuity, in which I revealed that his drowning death was faked. That Rick Fletcher-drawn tale will be reprinted next year in a St. Martin's Press collection, DICK TRACY'S FIENDISH FOES, along with a generous heaping portion of Gould stuff (and two more of my stories, drawn by Dick Locher).

Dear Mike and Katie,

Thank you for bringing back the detective genre to DC Comics with MS. TREE QUARTERLY. I've really enjoyed each of the first three issues.

While I had figured out who the "villain" of "Skeleton in the Closet" was early in the story, nevertheless I loved seeing the story unfold. I will admit—I'm a sucker for a good issue-related comics story. Some people may find such stories "preachy," but I find them much more interesting on the whole than multi-part sagas of mad gods attempting to destroy the cosmos. Collins's script did so much in its 48 pages—he wrote an intriguing mystery, penned not one but several great character studies, and not only dealt with issues regarding homophobia in society, but, in my opinion, forced each of us, whether gay or straight, to look into ourselves and examine our own attitudes.

Frank Balkin
address withheld by request

—Max Allan Collins

